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Benjamin Jan Kozicki

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Benjamin Jan Kozicki
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For my Grandma, and my Sonia, and my Mom.
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Introduction

This dissertation proposes a topological approach to narrative, specifically developed to provide a reading of Samuel Beckett's 'trilogy' of novels: *Molloy* (1951 tr. 1955), *Malone Meurt* (1953 tr. *Malone Dies* 1956), and *L'Innommable* (1953 tr. *The Unnamable* 1958), which are bound together in English as the *Three Novels*. At the same time this project offers a critique of structuralist approaches to literary criticism, ranging from the binarisms of Russian Formalism to more recent iterations in the field of narratology that prove inadequate to the analysis of a broader range of narrative forms and literary texts, giving specific attention to Bruce Clarke's 'systems-theoretical' approach in a chapter that provides a reading of Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Other chapters of This dissertation conduct a broader discussion of experimental fiction, metafiction, and the Nouveau Roman; considering literary and critical texts by Jorge Luis Borges, Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Jalousie* (1957 tr. *Jealousy* 1965), and Beckett's first published novel *Murphy* (1938). Primary theoretical influences for this project include the works of Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Louis Hjelmslev, and Jacques Lacan.

The primary question that remained a constant from the beginning of this project was: how do we read Beckett’s trilogy of novels? The relationship between the *Three Novels*, as they are often referred to by Anglophone critics, is already fraught and while the conventional understanding is that they represent a progression of mental degradation, physical decay, death, and (finally) decomposition there is as much to suggest that this reading is entirely unsatisfactory. Further, the novels themselves suggest an intertextual relation between others in Beckett's *œuvre*, which in turn suggests that the four (or more)
narratives of the trilogy are merely installments in an even larger text that spans across several titles including *Murphy, Watt* (1953), *Mercier et Camier* (1970), the *Nouvelles et textes pour rien* (1958) and beyond.

A constant problem that arises in the face of formalist approaches is their inadequacy to describe “an art which might be striving to subvert, in radically new ways not yet understood, these very principles.” In *Critique of Beckett Criticism: A Guide to Research in English, French, and German* (1994) T.J. Murphy et al. point out that “we obviously lack clearly worked out and coherent methodologies for dealing with Beckett’s art.” Noting that the earliest critical attempts date back to the 1960s, these attempts often apply a “combination of ‘formalist’ (read ‘New Criticism’) and ‘existentialist’ terms” deployed by critics such as Hugh Kenner, John Fletcher, Ruby Cohn, and Martin Esslin, who often fail “to show theoretically how the two [categories] can be reconciled.” (Murphy et al. 3-4). Philosophical content is certainly woven into Beckett’s texts, but its inclusion is not always as an affirmation. In their article “PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PARODY: Exceedingly Beckett” (2002) Steven Barfield and Philip Tew write that Beckett is “at particular moments a quintessential parodist” of philosophical “intellectual traditions that seem to be embedded in his own work” (93). Arguably the only apt philosophical comparison would be to Diogenes of Sinope, as Brian Finney recognizes that the such interventions in Beckett’s texts often proceed by way of *reductio ad absurdum* that takes these philosophical ideas to their extreme (Finney 845). Although philosophical readings of any given text might be useful to elaborate a point regarding a specific philosopher or concept, as with the application of formalist literary approaches, these interpretations often fail to address the texts
themselves. Poststructuralist approaches taken up since the late 1980s have sought to challenge the structuralist assumptions of earlier approaches, but these “critical theories are often pervaded by hidden or obscured formalist premises” or else veer into generic arguments “over whether Beckett is a Modernist, Late Modernist, or Postmodernist, or perhaps some alternative label altogether” (Murphy et al. 5). The proliferation of criticism since the turn of the century has spread out in a multitude of directions according to the predominant fashion of the day, if occasionally against it.

This is by no means an exhaustive assessment of the critical field which takes place in no less than four languages (English, French, German, and Italian), taking place the vein of multiple theoretical approaches in addition to those listed above (psychoanalytic, new historicist, etc.): approaches which are gestured towards here only to mark the relative departure that this project takes by contrast. Indeed, as Murphy et al. explain “many analyses so often rest upon a series of unexamined assumptions which were uncritically inherited from previous commentators, especially those of the early sixties” the initial position taken in this approach remains skeptical of – if occasionally openly hostile to – previous attempts (Murphy et al. 1). Fully aware that this is not the first ‘new approach’ to Beckett’s fiction, this endeavor hopes to “fail better” than previous failures (Worstward Ho 7).

Beckett's fiction is iconoclastic, even more so than his stage plays, and while the label of the "theater of the absurd" often circumscribes the latter there is not an adequate term or genre to encapsulate the former. Even still many of his stage plays evoke a Beckettian *je ne sais quoi* that often puts them in a space adjacent to individuals such as Eugène Ionesco, Harold Pinter, or Jean Genet, and arguably plays like *Not I* (1972) or the
television play *Quad* (1981) could be described as belonging to the theater of cruelty, conceived by Antonin Artaud, for the rigors that they put their actors through.

But when it comes to his fictions Beckett is almost peerless, except perhaps for the comparisons to James Joyce at one extreme or Nathalie Sarraute at another. The debt to Joyce is undeniable especially in earlier works like *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1992), Beckett’s first novel which was initially rejected for publication and only published in its entirety after his death in 1989, and *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) a collection of short stories containing sections of *Dream*. When it comes to questions of genre it is difficult to apply any one label to Beckett's fiction, one can describe earlier texts as works of Irish literature or High Modernism, but his first published novel *Murphy* takes a turn towards the avant-garde and escapes categorization as much as his later texts. Even these early texts evade attempts to label them Joycean or Irish, as the influence of Proust, Dante, and a list of others bears recognition. Beckett's fictions weave together strands from the western literary tradition: using Homer or Biblical stories like different colors of thread in his texts to create rich tapestries out of other narratives.

Texts written after *Watt*, which was composed in the early 1940s and finished shortly after the end of World War II, often receive the designation of ‘postmodern’ fiction, and indeed Beckett’s influence becomes nearly universal to the range of authors and genres that fall under the aegis of this term. The series of novels published after *Molloy*: the *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, the *Fizzles* (1976), on up to the second trilogy of *Company* (1980), *Mal vu mal dit* (1981), and finally *Worstward Ho* (1983) can easily be called *anti-romans* or antinovels alongside the work of Nathalie Sarraute. But while his later works progress towards a minimalist aesthetic that stands in stark contrast to the
overwrought prose of his early career, these fragments and fizzes take up an aesthetic that strives toward dissolution and applies a formal minimalism completely foreign to the minimalist technique applied by Sarraute in her *Tropisms*.

Between the two extremes of the early baroque in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and the stark minimalism of his *Fizzles*, between Joyce and Sarraute, all three authors engage in literary experimentation: and perhaps “experimental fiction” is the only appropriate term to locate Beckett in context with other authors. More important than locating Beckett’s work in the context of any specific literary movement it is more useful to this project to recognize Beckett's fictions in context of the authors that draw influence from him, including the genres of the *Nouveau Roman*, metafiction, or even the *Oulipo* (since authors like Italo Calvino and Julio Cortázar straddle at least the last two categories).

The first chapter, “Three Novels” focuses on Beckett’s first trilogy, better known in English as the omnibus edition *Three Novels* which begin to appear in 1960, following publication of the English edition of *The Unnamable* in 1958. Ironically, the earliest known use of the term "meta-fiction" in print appears in context to a review of the Calder omnibus version in the *Times Literary Supplement*, if only by accident, as the term is used to describe John Cowper Powys' novel *All or Nothing* (1960) which appears just above the review of Beckett’s trilogy.

The second chapter “Metafiction” takes a dérive of sorts through the field of experimental fiction that began to proliferate through the 1960s with a specific focus on the genre of metafiction as conceived by author, critic, and philosopher William H. Gass, and the literary critic Robert Scholes, who collaborate to advance the term and genre
beginning in 1970 in their respective essays "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction" (1970) and “Metafiction” (1970). Both critics offer a range of authors that influence and represent the genre they describe, and this chapter offers a brief survey of the central texts of this genre, with some minor correction provided by Patricia Waugh who reconsiders the project more than a decade later in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984). Although this chapter progresses towards a discussion of the critical *ficciones* of Jorge Luis Borges, whom Gass names along with Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov as primary influences to the genre, it also offers a survey of texts and theories that helped to inform the method developed and applied to the reading of Beckett in the first chapter. As such, this chapter proposes a range of texts and authors as a base archive for further development of a topological approach to narrative theory, the same way that the folk tale became the subject of inquiry for the Russian Formalists.

The third chapter, “Discorps du texte” turns to examine the attempt made by Bruce Clarke to fuse narratology and second-order cybernetics in his books *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems* (2008) and its subsequent iteration *Neocybernetics and Narrative* (2014). The overall sentiment of this chapter is nothing less than an indictment of the critical field that arose, primarily in English, in the 1970s following the introduction of Russian Formalist theory, by French theorists including Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette which remain largely mistranslated or misunderstood to this day. The source of these errors are at least threefold: first there is a fundamental confusion regarding the translation and definition of the Russian terms *fabula* and *sujet* into English which engenders an overall conceptual/terminological confusion; second the binary interdependencies between these terms are often misapplied
writ large to approaches, such as the one presented by Genette in his *Discours du récit* (1972), that actively seek to undermine the binary by shifting focus from the object/terms of the binary itself to the relations generated between specific these objects. This shift is a functional application of the semiotic method developed by Louis Hjelmslev in his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1943, tr. 1953) which demotes the object/terms to a secondary status. Although Hjelmslev’s direct influence is more explicit in the works of Roland Barthes or Christian Metz, the debt to the semiotic approach developed in the *Prolegomena* is evident in texts such as Todorov’s essay “*Les catégories du récit littéraire*” (1966) which appears in *Communications, 8, Recherches sémiologiques : l'analyse structurale du récit*, along with essays by Barthes, Metz, and A.J. Greimas.

The third error is perhaps the direst for Clarke, who bases his approach largely on Mieke Bal’s misunderstanding of Genette’s concept of “focalization,” forcing it back into the binary model that Genette specifically tried to undermine by proposing the concept in the first place. This error arises due to Bal’s critical misunderstanding of Genette who develops the concept based upon Todorov’s category of *aspect* proposed in “*Les catégories.*” Not only does Genette make it clear in his introduction that Todorov’s essay provides the formal grounding for his *Discours*, he explicitly references “*Les catégories*” when in the paragraph immediately preceding introduction of the term “focalization.” For Todorov and Genette the aspect of focalization is an *index of knowledge* relevant to the information presented to the reader by the narrator or narrative function of the text, as Todorov offers no less than four potential degrees of this index Genette applies it in a twofold manner: first to explode the binary distinction that he found prevalent in existing approaches to the narrative “point of view,” and second to divest the concept of narrative
perspective from models that remain more concerned with investing the narrative function in the identity of one character or another. Bal undoes this by reinvesting the concept of focalization into terms of identity, along a clear binary split between the narrator proper and characters in the text who speak, but whose speech does not formally count as narration.

Building upon Bal’s approach, Clarke also applies a binary logic to Genette’s Discours, attempting to support his systems-theoretical approach, which leads him to misinterpret the letter of the text itself. Upon a comparative analysis between Clarke’s citations of Genette, and the English translation: Discourse on Narrative (1980) – which maintains terminological fidelity to the French edition – Clarke provides a misreading that misquotes and misapplies Genette’s own terms and definitions. By overcoding his approach to Genette through the binary distinction between sujet and fabula – critical terms which do not appear in either the French or the English edition of the text – Clarke inexplicably: misidentifies the primary terms and definitions that Genette proposes in his introduction and uses in his analysis; second, replaces Genette’s own terms with ones that are partially derived from H. Porter Abbott and Paul Cobley’s understanding of fabula and sujet; third, misaligns the terms he derives from Genette with Bal’s “three-layer” model of narrative, the correction of which undermines his attempt to link up Genette’s or Bal’s understanding of narration and focalization to Niklas Luhmann’s second-order concepts of operation and observation. All of these errors carry over from Posthuman Metamorphosis into Neocybernetics and Narrative where Clarke makes a claim about Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway that is even invalidated by mutilated conceptualization
of focalization that Bal proposes in her book *Narratology* (1985), a distinction with
remains even in the fourth edition of the text that was issued in 2017.

The fourth chapter “Le sujet du La Jalousie” takes a closer look at the concept of
sujet in Todorov’s “Les catégories” through a discussion of Robbe-Grillet’s novel which
lends its title to the chapter itself. Todorov’s essay maintains a position of prominence in
the field of narrative study, as evinced by Genette’s reliance on it in his *Discours*. But
more relevant to the Anglophile obsession with the terms of Russian Formalism,
Todorov’s essay serves as a primary source for the introduction and definition of the
terms fabula and sujet in his own writing. Although these terms also appear in his essay
“Typologie du roman policier” (1966) which is reprinted in *Poétique de la prose* (1971)
and then translated into English (as “The Typology of Detective Fiction”) by Richard
Howard as *The Poetics of Prose* (1977), “Les catégories” retains prominence for several
reasons. First and foremost, Todorov introduces the terms according to Boris
Tomachevski on the one hand, and Victor Shklovsky on the other, both of whom present
a slightly different understanding of the concepts specifically with regards to the
definition of fabula. Following from this Todorov effectively dissolves the terms in a
discussion of the categories: time, aspect, and mode: offering a more nuanced approach to
narrative that shifts away from the rigid structures of mutually dependent binaries to
consider more pliable relationships between narrative elements. Third, although the
definition of sujet remains rather consistent between Tomachevski and Shklovsky, as “the
way the reader understands” the story, the discussion of temporal presentation goes
beyond mere considerations of ‘plot’ – a term that is never used by Todorov and only
ever imposed onto the term sujet by translators – and veers into a discussion of montage
as understood in the Soviet cinema of the 1920s ("Les catégories" 126-27; my translation).

The fifth and final chapter on Beckett’s first published novel *Murphy* is intentionally placed in the *ADDENDA* of this dissertation, both in a nod to the novel *Watt*, and the permutative approach discussed in the first chapter. Technically the ordering of this dissertation is arbitrary, as the chapter on *Murphy* could easily be read before the chapter on the *Three Novels*, or else immediately after. Initial conception of this dissertation’s arrangement had the first chapter last, the second chapter first, the third chapter second, and the reading of *La Jalousie* in the first chapter. An alternate structure was conceived whereby the third chapter was put first, the first and fourth together as a second in the middle, the fifth chapter on *Murphy* third, and the first chapter last. A prior iteration of this dissertation had only three chapters: in which the third chapter was a mere diminished section of one of these ur-chapters (perhaps the second, but possibly the first or last).¹

§ Topology

As a consequence to the late alterations to this project sections that concern, and while the majority of these sections could be placed in the chapter on the *Three Novels*, *mutatis mutandis* it seems more appropriate that an introduction to the topological theory of narrative should include a discussion of topology in the introduction.

The term *topology* itself has at least two points of origin in relation to this project. First and foremost, Beckett’s *Molloy* is literally a Möbius text with no proper orientation: no apparent beginning or ending, or else with the beginning in the middle and the ending
also in the middle, reversing the order. The consequences of this are discussed in the appropriate chapter. Second, but no less important, the term is also used by Barthes’ essay *S/Z* (1970 tr. 1974) and the concept is discussed critically across several other essays in reference to his concept of *hyphology*, a term which he introduces in *La Plaisir du texte* (1973 tr. *The Pleasure of the Text* 1975) although he begins its development from as early as “The Death of the Author” (1967) where he refers to the text as a "tissue" (IMT 146).

This essay (which appears in English before it is published in French as “*La mort de l’auteur*” in 1968) marks a critical shift in Barthes career from his earlier semiological approach, one that remains structuralist, into the territory of poststructuralism. In “Death of the Author” Barthes envisions the text as a virtual location that is more complex than its supposed materiality when he writes that the text "is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God)" or else the reductive interpretation that would limit it to some faceted meaning that it actually tries to escape, "but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (IMT 146). When reading a text, any text, the reader becomes the space on (or in) which the text is inscribed, a space in which the dimensions that must be flattened out for it to be printed on the page or rendered on the screen. But in the theater of the mind the text enters the proper dimensional space to unfold and reveal itself and its depth.

In *S/Z* (1970) Barthes elaborates that reading is a form of work "and the method of this work is topological: I am not hidden in the text, I am simply irrecoverable from it: my task is to move, to shift systems" within the text and find meaning or signification in
the connotations of the text (10). In “From Work to Text” (1971) he proposes a more
dynamic and multivalent reading than the "inductive-deductive science of texts," in other
words the structuralist or purely semiological approach, that is rendered inadequate by
the density and polysemy of the writerly text (IMT 160). In S/Z he proposes this method
is "concerned not to manifest a structure but to produce a structuration of the text"
describing a space that creates "a kind of network, a topos through which the entire text
passes (or rather, in passing, becomes text)" and in doing so he applies his five codes as
sheaves or a set of tools with which to map out points of signification and meaning within
this space (20). In the theater of the mind the flattened dimensions of the text become
apparent, and at the same time multiply in conjunction with the mind of the reader:
adding up to more than the sum of dimensions present between the two.

To be sure, through the act of reading itself the reader navigates through the space
of the text, and he returns to this concept in Pleasure where he advances it, stating:

hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil,
behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now
emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is
worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue-this texture-the
subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive
secretions of its web. Were we fond of neologisms, we might define the
theory of the text as an hyphology (hyphos is the tissue and the spider's
web) (Pleasure 64).

In her essay "Text, Textus, Hyphos" Marie-Rose Logan tracks the development
of the term throughout Barthes' writing and identifies a shift in understanding beginning
with Pleasure that carries into his later works. Drawing attention to the function of
interweaving, she writes that Barthes presents the text "not as an object or a system of
correlates, but as a discursive process, intermediary in the encounter between the subject
writing and the text-object." Specifically, "the nature of the object has changed: it is no longer a finished piece of cloth, but a piece of cloth in the making" woven between the subject of the reader and the text-object itself (Logan 74). The notions of the readerly \((\text{lisible})\) and writerly \((\text{scriptible})\) text come into play here, and in the latter the reader takes up the active role of the \textit{scriptor} and the text becomes an \textit{extimate} object that is neither internal nor external. As the distance between reading and writing collapses, so that as the text is projected into the mind of the reader the reader is also projected “into the work” joining the two “in a single signifying practice” (IMT 162).

Properly shifting from semiology to the semiotic approach developed by Louis Hjelmslev, Barthes employs the concepts of denotation and connotation in the service of the topological reading; the former being the system of primary signification, whereas the latter as a secondary meaning "whose signifier is itself constituted by a sign or system of primary signification" in the denotation of the text \((S/Z 7)\). Barthes describes connotation as "a correlation imminent in the text" but which also "has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or to another text)" or else to the system of the text itself and is "determined by two spaces: a sequential space, ... subject to the successivity of sentences, in which meaning proliferates by layering; and an agglomerative space ... correlating [to] other meanings outside the material text" to form a "nebulae' of signifieds" \((S/Z 8)\). Connotation is the way into reading the polysemy of the text that arises in excess of the denotative signification. “Topically, connotations are meanings which are neither in the dictionary nor in the grammar of the language in which a text is written" as is the denotative content, rather connotation is referent to
either another dimension or value of the text itself that is not legible according to the
denotative signification of the text (S/Z 8).

Barthes draws heavy theoretical influence from Jacques Lacan who advances the
concept of *dit-mension* in his *Seminar Encore* (delivered in 1972-73), in reference to the
dimension of the signifier, the dwelling of speech or the stage of language (XX 21, see
also fn 21). Lacan employs this concept in subsequent years of his *Seminar* as he takes an
aggressively topological approach. In *Les Non-Dupes Errent* he explains that

there are three dimensions of the space inhabited by the speaker, and that
these three *ditmansions*, as I write them, are called the Symbolic, the
Imaginary, and the Real. It's not quite like Cartesian coordinates; it's not
because there are three, do not be deceived. Cartesian coordinates are old
geometry. It is because ... it is because it is a space, mine, as I define it of
these three *dit-mansions*, it is a space whose points are determined quite
differently. (*Les Non-Dupes Errent*, 4; my translation)

Although the term *ditimension* is proposed late in Lacan's career his use of
topology remains consistent throughout his career as he builds off Freud’s first and
second topographies to develop the *schema L²* and *graph of desire*, introduced in the
second (1954-55) and fifth years (1955-56) of his *Seminar* respectively. In his book on
*The Graph of Desire* (2009) Alfredo Eidelzstein points out can be mapped onto the
surface of a cross cap (or interior eight), a topological projection that Lacan introduces,
along with the torus, during sessions of his ninth *Seminar*, on *Identification*, delivered in
the spring of 1962 (Eidelzstein 32).

Topology is a relatively new form of math, developed at the beginning of the 20th
century through a combination of geometry and set theory. While its formal basis
recognized as early as Leonard Euler's "*Solvito Problematis and Geometriam Sitvs*"
(1736 tr. “Seven Bridges of Königsberg”), which also lays the foundations for graph
As Lacan begins to formalize his psychoanalytic approach through the middle of his career, he makes frequent reference not only Cantor but Bernhard Riemann and Henri Poincaré, progenitors and early forerunners of topology who provide conceptual ground for the development and introduction of the discipline at the beginning of the 20th century. Additionally, he references Nicolas Bourbaki, the collective of predominantly French mathematicians who sought to introduce a rigorous and unified approach to mathematics in their series Éléments de mathématique (Elements of Mathematics) with the publication of the first edition Théorie des ensembles (Theory of Sets) in 1939. Several subsequent volumes focus specifically on topology beginning with Livre III: Topologie (1940), portions of which are published before Livre II: Algèbre (1942).

In his later seminars Lacan began to consult and work with the mathematicians Pierre Soury, Michel Thomé and Jean-Michel Vappereau, as his discourse advanced into knot theory. In addition to the hundreds of letters exchanged between Lacan and these individuals there are apocryphal tales of Lacan ordering bike innertubes in bulk which he would then cut up as part of a practical experimentation in the service of developing his understanding of topology.

Like rubber inner tubes, topological surfaces can be stretched or deformed: topologically a donut and a coffee mug are the same object, literally a one-handled torus, since they are homeomorphic: they can be continuously deformed into one another [fig. 0.1.1] (Wolfram, homeomorphic).
We already think of narrative in terms of geometry, in addition to Freytag's pyramid the Bremond cycle is another graphic structure -- it is not a stretch to extend the metaphor slightly and think of a text or a story not as a line or a path to be followed, but an area or region to be explored. On the one hand this is just a figural, metaphorical way of approaching narrative that is not very far from applying the graphic representation of Gustav Freytag that has become *de rigueur* to any classroom discussion of narrative or plot. But on the other this approach is explicitly literal.

In addition to being deformed, folded, and pierced, topologies can also be cut and sutured back together: and this is precisely the reference employed by Barthes at the beginning of *Pleasure* where he discusses how reading Sade creates two edges and draws them together to form a “seam” between “antipathetic codes” in the text leading to an
erotic contradiction that generates new meaning (6-7). Barthes compares this to the “untenable, impossible” jouissance “so relished” by Sade's libertine who "manages to be hanged and then cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm" (*Pleasure* 7).

This “hedonistic aesthetics” is already proposed in “From Work to Text” where elaborates that reading proceeds by way of *play* that generates an infinity of meanings “not according to an organic process of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations” created through a redistribution of language (IMT 158).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 0.1.3**

The topological property of the text allows one to make cuts in the text and suture its parts together in different configurations: to make new connections, to read across borders – across the edges or seams that one can form by bringing two sections of the text
together. Barthes is explicit: "such redistribution is always achieved by cutting" (Pleasure 6). This is precisely what we already do through a process of close reading, through the cutting and redistribution of the text we create seams, make new edges and bring them together in a potentially infinite number of variations. By simply extending concepts that already exist, ever so slightly, into the realm of topology, we can unlock a powerful new set of tools, concepts, and methods of understanding narrative. This is the prolegomena to that approach.
Chapter 1

Three Novels

Here’s my beginning. Because they’re keeping it apparently. I took a lot of trouble with it. Here it is. It gave me a lot of trouble. It was the beginning, do you understand? Whereas now it’s nearly the end. Is what I do now any better? I don’t know. That’s beside the point. Here’s my beginning. It must mean something or they wouldn’t keep it. Here it is.

– Molloy (8)

Proposed method for the analysis of Beckett’s Fiction

1 renounce your mother tongue
2 move to France
3 fight against the Nazis, or the Vichy
4 give Andre the Giant rides to school
5 be Samuel Beckett

Alternate method for the analysis of Beckett’s Fiction
The aim of this project is to begin construction of a narrative theory: a set of tools, techniques, terms and practical approaches to narrative analysis that seeks to be useful and rigorous but makes no pretense to be a rigorous science itself. This specific method has been conceived in order to approach Samuel Beckett’s first trilogy of novels: *Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable*, the possibility of its application to other texts is open for use as the texts allow themselves to it. Every novel creates its own rules, there is no one way to read every work of fiction according to the same set of rules, especially if those rules were constructed to read a different type of story.

While the focus of this inquiry is his trilogy there are certainly parallels between these novels and *Watt* which is just as enigmatic. For instance, *Watt* has an Addenda and in the footnote to the title of the section we are told

> The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevent its incorporation. (*Watt*, 205)

The contents of the Addenda consist of a handful of fragments: stanzas of verse, paragraphs, bits of dialog, a “descant heard by Watt on way to station (IV)” as well as four bars to the score of a “Threne heard by Watt in a ditch from station” for soprano (213-14). Critics and readers alike wonder what these fragments mean, and if they can be placed into the text of the first four parts of the novel which contain gaps where a “?” sits in between two chunks of text. Of course, perhaps not since the final bit of precious and illuminating material simply tells us

> no symbols where none intended (214)

In this way *Watt* is playfully enigmatic. The content and structure of the novel itself is truly modular. Watt is merely one in a series of individuals at Mr. Knott’s house,
he is replaced just as he replaces another. The Addenda tells us “that Mr. Knott to was serial, in a vermicular series” (212).

vermicular: (adj) 1. like a worm in form or movement, vermiform

The text of Watt itself suggests that there are multiple ways of arranging the four sections of the text as the first lines of section IV let us know:

As Watt told the beginning of his story, not first but second, so not fourth but third, now he told its end. Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story. Heroic quatrains are not otherwise elaborated. (Watt 178)

The concept of permutations is predominant in the novel. Watt modulates his speech according to a logic of permutation where he applies a range of modulations, inversions, and backmasking so that he speaks in reverse. This has lead critics like Paul Di Pierro to examine the narrative structure and propose that the entire novel can be arranged as a cycle as he does in his book Structures in Beckett’s Watt (1981). At the same time that he proposes this cycle Di Pierro alights on the fact that the addenda tells us that Arthur (one of the characters in the novel) has kept a journal which:

sets up an interesting conjecture. Are the parts of the novel, which cannot be attributed directly to Sam [the narrator], reflection, in part or whole, of that journal? Or is the same possibly applicable even to some parts within Sam’s narration? In other words, does Arthur represent still another level of narration and point of view? Or are we presented with the possibility that this dimension does not exist in the novel because Arthur’s journal has been “lost” or has never been integrated into the text? (Di Pierro 70–71)

Di Pierro considers the possibility that “‘non-directional’ or ‘multidirectional’” arrangements are “excellent characterization of the narrative structure” in addition to “non-linear or discontinuous” possibilities, and he further qualifies that these permutations can be applied to characters and setting (74). Although his focus is on Watt,
we have to consider the possibility that these possibilities extend not only to other texts, but to Beckett’s entire body of fiction itself. As Jonathan Boulter observes that the trilogy is merely part of "one large narrative" that combines with other texts (Boulter 2001, 108).

There is a limit to the degree which this possibility can be explored at this time, but what this suggest is that modes of analysis adherent to the strictures of Formalism or even structuralism are inapt for the analysis of Beckett’s fiction. While certainly the text themselves suggest the presence of forms and structures, and the possibilities of the modulations, there is a difference between the rigid approaches that predominate the critical discussion of most texts and the possibility that opens up in consideration of a more diverse range of modes, structures, permutations, etc. which we will consider now as a preliminary step towards a more diverse method of literary analysis.

**Narrative Modulation**

Three aspects of narrative modulation to consider in the trilogy are: permutations of order, frame embedding, and iterative permutations.

**Order**

Permutations of order refer to the sequencing of the plot, specifically as *Molloy* presents us with a conundrum as to which half of the novel should go first. While there are several ways in which the four narratives could be rearranged, there are at least three possible orders that can be constructed depending on which half of *Molloy* preceded the other.
Embedding

The possibility of embedding makes the linear order irrelevant, or at least reduces its importance, and places stress on the orientation of the narratives in terms of which iteration is responsible for the authorship of the others. Indeed, as the questions of order and identity become secondary to the question of authorship in Malone Dies and The Unnamable, the orientation of the texts shifts from a linear progression to the structure of a mise-en-abyme of frame tales.

Iteration

Permutations of iteration open to a comparison between the trilogy and other texts in the series of tramps and paralytics including Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and Camier, and possibly others. Although at the same time there are iterative forms within the novels themselves that produce different readings of the texts. One of the more obvious iterations is the frame that begins each of the first three narratives: with a man in a room who is writing. In addition to intertextual iterations there are also intratextual permutations that reference specific events within the particular narrative, for instance the way that the mention of A and C near the beginning of Molloy refers to later events both in Molloy's narration as well as in Moran's. Similar intertextual reference is made in Mercier et Camier in the plot summaries that follow each chapter, although these instances fall outside of the narration unlike the references to A and C which are narrated.

The possibility of taking other texts into consideration broadens the spectrum of modulation in a manner that can only be gestured towards here, although a few
relationships are already presupposed by the texts themselves within some of these permutations. Specifically the notion that Moran is something of a bounty hunter who had in the past pursued Murphy or Yerk from the *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, and in fact none of the modulations necessarily effect this narrative. The *Textes pour rien*, function as a "coda" to the trilogy, as Brian Finney notes that each of the thirteen texts play on variations on themes "already adumbrated in the trilogy" (Finney 855). The *Nouvelles* anticipate the narratives of the trilogy "in theme and form" of interior monologue as "each protagonist, like his successors in the trilogy, tells himself 'this story that aspires to be the last'" (Finney 850). At the same time that the *Nouvelles* function in an iterative sense with respect to the trilogy their protagonist, Yerk, becomes integrated into the diegetic plane as one of the individuals that Youdi sends Moran after before the Molloy affair.

This is by no means a complete / formalized analysis: complete with relation to the trilogy itself or else in relation to the possibilities introduced by other texts in the series or universe that the trilogy exists in; formalized in the sense of the terms used since these will have to be further refined in subsequent iterations of this chapter. Since this entire project was executed in reverse order there are sections of this chapter that were written before certain terms or concepts were pragmatically available, and even the understanding of certain functions or aspects of the text have been modified slightly for this draft from their iteration in previous drafts.

One aspect which remains relatively undeveloped is the identification of the level at which these modulations and permutations manifest or become operative. Some are syntactical, others formal, and to a large degree this analysis focuses on formal aspects.
Identification of whether or not a relation or modulation occurs at a denotative or connotative level is admittedly impoverished, although for the large degree it will simply be assumed that most of these manifestations are connotative expressions this is not certain. Connotative semiotic relations occur specifically between semiotic planes and at this stage in the project these planes have not been properly identified. In most instances it will simply be assumed that the semiotic relation is formally connotative although it may actually be denotative by definition. More important at this point is the understanding that modulations or permutations can occur at different levels in the text.

This suggest the need for a system of codes similar to that employed by Barthes in *S/Z*, and while the topological approach taken to his reading of *Sarrasine* (1830) is a guiding principle to this project his codes are perhaps inapt. Hjelmslev’s *Prolegomena*, which was certainly a crucial text for Barthes, serves as an optimal starting point for the development of these codes but should not be considered the only source. Indeed, since the method that follows deals largely with structures of embedding the analysis of other literary texts (including the primary texts themselves) have helped to inform the initial conception of this method. Certainly it will need expansions and refinements.

**Möbius Text**

*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. – Molloy (176)*

At the end of *Molloy*, when Moran goes back inside the house to write, we find ourselves at a crossroads with no less than three directions to choose from: we can go
back to the beginning of part II, back to the beginning of part I, or on to the beginning of 
*Malone Dies*. The third and fourth to last sentences of *Molloy* repeat the first two
sentences of part II “It is midnight, the rain is beating on the windows” suggesting a
fourth option: that we could return to the beginning of part II and re-read the second half
of the novel from here (92). But does this mean that Moran literally goes back inside, sits
down and writes “It is midnight” from this point? Or does he actually become Molloy?
Because it “was not midnight. It was not raining.”

At the end of the novel our inclination tells us that we should go back to the
beginning and keep reading, and Steven Connor the question of order has “exercised
most commentators on the novel” (1988, 56). In Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and
Text (1988). Connor makes a Formalist appeal writing "for one thing, Moran's narrative
doesn't actually precede Molloy's as we perhaps feel it should” yet he acknowledges that
the text displays a degree of “reversibility” (56). He continues that “each possible reading
of the novel, forwards and backwards,” raises the problem that the novel gives us too
much material “allowing us to believe both that Moran becomes Molloy and that Molly’s
adventures precede Moran’s” (57). The last two sentences of the novel do not repeat the
third and fourth sentences of Moran’s report, but instead negate the previous two in the
very way that Molloy often contradicts himself. Does this mean we should go all the way
to the beginning of part I? Should we read: *It was not midnight. It was not raining. ... I
am in my mother’s room. It's I who live there now.*

Jonathan Boulter considers the paradoxes that arise from the contradictory
“compels us to into maintaining both possibilities in a kind of permanent suspension
where nothing can be known and nothing can be denied with any certainty” that results in
an unstable situation where “both things could be true” (113). If there is any indication as
to which part of Molloy precedes the other, the text itself makes the case that part II
should precede part I. Moran may very well go back inside to write his report at the end
of the novel and his report, and he may at this point return inside to write the first part of
the novel, because part I acknowledges that it is a second report. The first paragraph of
the novel references two beginnings, the beginning and my beginning, and the narrator
mentions a previous text that “began at the beginning” but had “begun all wrong” (8).

If the order of the text seems arbitrary then perhaps that’s because it is arbitrary.
Instead of worrying about order, what if we side stepped the question of which part goes
first altogether? Like a torus, or a Möbius strip, Molloy is nonorientable – order and
orientation do not matter. When you finish part I you continue on to part II and when you
finish part II you can loop back to the beginning of part I. The text has no ‘end’ except
for when you decide to stop reading it, the question of order is no longer relevant to its
analysis. The level of plurality makes Molloy an ideal text that Barthes describes in S/Z
writing:

In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without anyone of
them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a
structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access
to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to
be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach,
they are indeterminable (meaning here is never subject to a principle of
determination, unless by throwing dice); the systems of meaning can take
over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based
as it is on the infinity of language. (5-6)

In a direct way the text itself invites us to reread it, if not for the similarities between
Molloy and Moran, or the degradation that Moran experiences as he becomes what Brian
Finney calls an “uncanny copy” of Molloy – then by the sheer difficulty of reading the novels second paragraph (Finney 850). By the end of the novel we feel the urge to return to the beginning, but even a few pages in one is likely to stop and flip through the book just to see how long this second paragraph is . . .

EIGHTY
PAGES
LONG
!!!

A monolith of text overtly violating not only the novelistic form, but also standards of syntax that date back to ancient Greece; the absence of any separation or indication of a new paragraph makes it difficult to find a place to stop or resume (Lewis 9). If you don’t mark your place on the page when you check how long the paragraph is you will have to reread a few lines. Heaven forbid you should drop the book, or that the bookmark should fall out when you pick it up, or as it jostles in your bag during your daily commute. But even still, you might have stopped in an awkward spot, or perhaps you were too tired to process the text the night before, and when you look at the book in the light of a new day nothing is familiar, nothing makes any sense. You read back a few pages until you find something you remember, or maybe you’re still close enough to the beginning that you just decide to start over. At some point in the first half of the book you are literally forced to retrace your steps, to reread some area of the text you already covered whether you remember it or not. If it has been a while since you last picked it up for a read you will probably need to start over. You can try to read the second paragraph in one sitting, but your attention will surely wane. If you’re clever you’ll read with a
pencil in hand and make your own marks as you try to decide where a new paragraph should begin. You literally become the editor of the text whether you do this on the page or in your head. *Reading becomes an act of cutting and redistribution,* of creating edges and bringing them together in a potentially infinite number of variations.

In “From Work to Text” (1971) Barthes writes that the text is like a musical score “it asks of the reader a practical collaboration” the act of reading becomes interminable (IMT 163). One discovers something new with each subsequent reading, a stone here, a hidden path there. The terrain shifts, the landscape looks different depending on what time of day it is, what time of year, when you last read it. You change in between readings and in each new attempt, just like Moran, just like Molloy.

There is a degree of synchronicity that exists between the two halves of the novel: both reports are written post-facto, both narratives are framed as a report of past events, and both texts begin by grounding themselves in a similar frame and a present tense before embarking on a recounting of events that then catches up to that point. Just as Molloy begins part I by telling us that he is writing in his room, this is how Moran begins part II. The establishing scenes of both parts mention a female servant or “chambermaid,” and both narrators reference a son who is physically absent. Molloy mentions a man who visits him “every Sunday” to collect his work and is “always thirsty” and his figure is reminiscent of Gaber: who visits Moran on Sundays and who comes to collect Moran’s report (8, 95, 175). The similarities multiply from here: both Molloy and Moran come across a shepherd; both describe random and violent altercations that result in the murder of a strange man. Both endings mention birds chirping and a change in the weather, and
as Moran states a reversal in his final lines, Molloy also comments at the end of his paragraph that “there seemed to be rain, then sunshine, turn about” (91).

David Pattie writes that by the end of the novel that Moran becomes a “mirror image” of the Molloy, and they “come to the same general location by differing routes” (67-8). If we were to consider Molloy to be nonorientable, like a Möbius strip, the Molloy/Moran figure could travel along an orientation-reversing path and end up back where he started in a mirror reversed state. This does not answer the question as to the proper order of the two halves of Molloy, but if we consider the novel to be a Möbius text then the question of order becomes irrelevant.

![Figure 1.1 Weeks 49](image)

In his book *The Shape of Space* (2002), Jeffrey Weeks explains the mirror reversing paradox using was is commonly referred to as the “flatlander” example: a two-dimensional being that lives in a two-dimensional world, who embarks on a journey along an orientation-reversing path only to return home as a mirror reversed version of itself [Fig. 1.1]. This is possible providing that at least three conditions are met: the first
is that this surface must be nonorientable, like a Möbius strip or a Klein bottle. The mirror reversing phenomenon will not occur if the surface is orientable, like a sphere or a cylinder. The second is that the flatlander must be embedded in the surface: if the flatlander sits on the manifold in a third dimension it will merely appear to be mirror reversed from a certain perspective, but the actual reversal will not take place [Fig. 1.2].

The third condition is corollary to the second: if the manifold has two dimensions and zero thickness, then the flatlander must also have the same number of dimensions: it must literally be a part of this manifold. If all of these conditions are met then the flatlander can embark on a journey from any given point and return to that exact same point as a completely mirror reversed version of itself so that left becomes right, up becomes down, etc. [Fig. 1.1].

This is precisely the state that Molloy is in when he first enters town, stating that “I confuse east and west, the poles too, I invert them readily” (19). Molly’s state of
reversal explains the difficulty he experiences navigating his way to his mother’s house; why he goes the wrong way after being released from police custody. Curiously enough, in the scenario the Weeks constructs for his flatlander example, as the return of those who explore the reversing region leads to confusion in the town. To the reversed individuals all of the words on the street signs appear backwards, they travel on the wrong side of the street, and their behavior appears odd to the townsfolk who were not sent out to explore the reversing region adjacent to their town (Weeks 46). Not only does this hypothesis account for why Molloy has so much trouble in town, and keeps drawing the attention of the authorities in the first place, it also explains why Molloy is constantly uncertain about which leg is the bad one. Depending on whether or not he is in a mirror reversed state it could either be the right or the left and still be the exact same leg.

This explanation also accounts for the difficulty and confusion that Moran experiences once his transformation begins. A prime example of this is the instance when his son steers the bicycle “left when I told him right, or when I told him left” (161). And by the end of the novel Moran’s confusion becomes total, as he states that “physically speaking it seemed to me that I was now becoming rapidly unrecognizable. And when I passed my hands over my face… the face my hand felt was not my face any more, and the hands my face felt were my hands no longer” (170). Apart from the growing similarity in their physical characteristics, and accoutrements, Moran’s prose also comes to resemble Molloy’s as his narrative progresses. While the syntax of part II initially stands out in stark contrast to Molloy’s massive, unedited 80-page paragraph, Moran’s crisp, grammatical sentences draw out and morph into to run-ons. And his own tidy paragraphs begin to stretch out across multiple pages, and what begins as a cogent and
coherent narrative eventually devolves into a ramble reminiscent of Molloy’s own addled tale.

Shortly after describing the difficulty he experiences with his son and the bike, Moran mentions his “Obidil,” literally the reversed spelling of ‘libido,’ and in the context of this reference Moran envisions Molloy with a closeness, literally invoking his appearance by wishing for him to “grow to be a friend, like a father to me” (161-2). While this reverence is not perfectly explicit, at this point the text becomes vague and hallucinatory, it is not the first instance where Moran mentions Molloy in the context of discussing his own psychic function. Earlier on he refers to his own “private Molloy” that inhabits him, a Molloy he “stalked within” like some repressed persona or unconscious manifestation (115).

Like Molloy’s object of virtu which “had a most specific function always to be hidden” from him, the reference to Moran’s Obidil hints at a secret function in the text itself (64). This is the point in Moran’s journey when he is furthest from home, and just outside of Molloy’s town, but when everything goes completely awry. Just prior to this point Moran gets into a fight with his son (after his failed encounter with the shepherd), and when he wakes the next day his son is gone along with the bike. Moran also expresses the feeling of being left “alone for some considerable time,” raising the possibility that his son had been absent for much longer than just a few hours (160). He laments his inability to go into town, but a few lines on comments that, “there were moments when it did not seem so far from me, when I seemed to be drawing towards it as the sands towards the wave,” and in this instance it is unclear if “it” refers to: the town,
Molloy himself, the thought of Youdi’s punishment, or else the “strange laughter” this entire thought process elicits from him (162).

“Moran” might not go in to town, but “Molloy” certainly does. Although, there is no indication that Molloy is even really the narrator’s name in the first place, and the narrator in part I does not identify himself until 14 pages in. “Molloy” is merely the name he blurts out at the police station. Several critics have drawn comparison between Molloy and Homer’s Odyssey, and K. J. Phillips identifies how the encounter with the police sergeant echoes Odysseus’ confrontation with the Cyclops (Phillips 21-2). Indeed, as Molloy is an extremely common surname in the Irish midlands region it is metaphorically equivalent to the name ‘anybody’ – or else, ‘nobody’ – but as the fictional region of Bally is also described by Moran as “Molloy country” this name becomes as good as John Doe (131). But whereas Odysseus gains his freedom from the Cyclops with his wits, Molloy’s witlessness and self-deception secure his release from police custody. The narrator assumes this identity for the rest of the paragraph, until the final lines where the narrative voice slips into the third person.

The curious thing about Molloy is that he only really exists for the greater span of a paragraph, albeit an extremely long one. And in the final sentence of that paragraph the text reads “Molloy could stay, where happened to be” which is not the first time that the text refers to Molloy in the third person (91). These mentions begin to appear just after his release from police custody, first in a self-referential comment: “don’t torment yourself, Molloy” (26). The second instance is made from a retrospective point of view that introduces a degree of distance between the narrative voice and the persona itself: “for when I try and think of that night, on the canal-bank, I find nothing, no night
perfectly speaking, and nothing but Molloy in the ditch” (28). The third instance is the most intriguing, and prescient: “chameleon in spite of himself, there you have Molloy, viewed from a certain angle” for as we progress through the trilogy we eventually come to realize that Molloy is a figure that changes depending upon the perspective he is viewed from (30). But unlike in these previous instances where the narrative voice reenters the persona, in the final instance the character of Molloy becomes vacated.

**Molloy in the ditch**

As the first part of the novel comes to an end Molloy finds himself in a ditch and sees, “faintly outlined against the horizon, the towers and steeples of a town” and this scene is reminiscent of the part when Moran gazes at the lights of Bally and conjures his Obidil (91). To be sure, by this point in Moran’s narrative he already acknowledges that he “had changed and was still changing” (153). But changing into what? Or whom? It is significant to note the importance of ditches for Molloy, as they always precede a shift in location, or mark a new beginning. Another parallel that Phillips draws between Molloy and Odysseus, and as the latter’s descent to the underworld occurs via a trench, ditches serve as metaphorical portals for Molloy (Phillips 20). Often as a break from digression, an abrupt transition, the first such instance comes early in the text and marks a point of transition from the perch on the rock: the vantage point that the text establishes at the beginning of the second paragraph. Emerging from the ditch Molly expresses his general state of confusion and then enters town – and we should consider this the point where Moran, in fact, continues his journey as Molloy. But while the ditch serves as a point of
reentry, where the movement of Molloy’s quest is resumed, at the end of the second paragraph it becomes a point of exit, where Molloy is finally put down and laid to rest.

Although Moran does not mention entering Bally, we should consider the possibility that his trip into town is one of the adventures omitted from his first report (which is presented in part II), but then conveyed in the second report (part I). As both sections texts readily acknowledge the presence of gaps in the narrative there is a degree of self-awareness present in the text that functions as an appeal to confidence. Molloy offers a *mea culpa* for this fact when he states: “you must choose, between the things not worth mentioning and those even less so. For if you set out to mention everything you would never be done, and that’s what counts, to be done, to have done” (41). But whereas Molloy’s moment of recognition in this matter serves as an innocuous admission to one of the universal fact of narration, Moran gestures to “not dwell upon” the “furies and treacheries… the fiends in human shape and the phantoms of the dead that tried to prevent” his journey (166). Moran makes several similar appeals, openly admitting to the exclusion of, “the obstacles we had to surmount, the fiends we had to circumvent, the misdemeanours of the son, the disintegrations of the father” (157). And as Moran’s report frequently glosses over the details, and these statements begin to pile up, it raises the question of *what is being omitted?*

The voice that Molloy hears could simply be Gaber’s, when he suddenly appears to give Moran his orders to return home. While there is no mention of a ditch at this point in Moran’s half of the novel, the account becomes vague and hallucinatory between his fight with his son and Gaber’s reappearance. Moran professes to holding “no illusions, I knew that all was about to end, or to begin again… I had only to wait” (161). But wait for
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what? This cryptic statement is made just after the striking revelation that he instructed his son to look out for a second bicycle, and he admits that “with a little practice,” he intends to learn, “to pedal with one leg” – which is precisely how Molloy pilots his own bike (161). Indeed, Molloy tells us that he didn’t even know that he had a bike until discovering it early in the novel, and this expression of ignorance echoes Moran’s assumption that his son took off with their bike after their fight (16). But if there is a second bike, one that Moran forgot about, and if we accept that Molloy and Moran are but two personae of the same individual, then we can say that this second bike is the same one that Molloy finds near the beginning of part I.

**The Man with the Stick**

In his book *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect* (1973) H. Porter Abbott dismisses the idea that Molloy and Moran are the same individual as nothing more than the product of an “obsession with unity” even as he draws up a list of similarities between the two halves of the novel (99-100). Comparing *Molloy* to other texts, such as *Mercier et Camier*, or *Waiting for Godot*, Abbott declares that this doubling is “doubtless a result, in part, of Beckett’s growing fascination with the possibilities of symmetrical composition” and that the similarity is nothing more than “a concentrated example of what Beckett does throughout his entire canon when he has names and objects reappear from work to work” (99). In other words, the other figure that he offloads the onus for his argument here is the author, which simply shifts the site of unity onto this romanticized figure.
Abbott then presents evidence that, in fact, contradicts his thesis when he points out how *Molloy* differs from the rest of Beckett’s œuvre as “the repeated elements seize the reader’s attention with greater urgency because now the separate narratives are squeezed between the same covers” (99). But then Abbott’s criticism only approaches the text at a structural level, and he fails to account for the similarities between accounts, or the points where the two narratives happen to overlap.

The motif of the double is certainly present in *Molloy*, from the beginning of the second paragraph and the introduction of A and C. Abbott ponders the “mystery of relation” evoked by the pair in the “preamble” before Molloy enters town, and weakly suggests that this is somehow an allusion to Mercier and Camier, if only as a formal exploration of the “possibilities of symmetrical composition” (98-99). But in the French edition A and C are “A ou B” and Abbott fails to make the obvious connection to Moran and his son (Minuit 15). A goes into town, while C departs the other way on by-ways he seemed hardly to know, or not at all” propelling himself with the aid of a “stout stick” the former is clearly the son while the latter is clearly Moran (9-10). And C is the man with the stick, from the first mention of the figure in the novel, just as Moran is the first man with the stick in the iteration of the series in part II. There is no mystery, the preamble at the beginning of the second paragraph is a vague recapitulation of the episode when Moran sends his son into town to purchase a bike.

While Abbott dismisses any “obsession with unity” he displays a clear obsession with doubles comparing Molloy and Moran to nearly every other pseudocouple in Beckett’s oeuvre. But even more than Didi and Gogo, or Pozzo and Lucky, the pair that best mirrors Molloy and Moran are Saposcat and Macmann. This is not immediately
apparent, as from the outset Sapo’s story is completely different than the others. But then in the middle of the story Sapo finds himself caught in the rain, lying flat on the ground, rolling around in a plain complete with greatcoat and a hat that is “attached, by a string, for safety, to the topmost button of the coat” just like Molloy’s (227-28). Sapo’s family and the Lamberts are brushed aside and forgotten, his name is changed to Macmann, and he is brought to a hospital. Aside from the similar details between characters, the unlikely amalgamation of Sapo and Macmann doubles the premise that Molloy and Moran are merely two phases of the same individual or character, except instead of the abrupt cut that separates the tales of Molloy and Moran the gap between Sapo and Macmann is bridged by Malone’s commentary.

At the same time, Abbott is right: we can postulate that A and C are iterations of Mercier and Camier, if not also permutations of Moran and his son. The resemblance between the man in the suit and Moran may indicate that he mistook his son for a different person, killed him, and then hallucinated or lied about the events that happen after the altercation. Although he reports his son's return with the bike and they head on to Ballyba, when they encounter the Shepherd at the edge of the town the son waits at the side of the road. Moran suffers an aphasia, and why his son does not intervene is unaccounted for, the text simply mentions that Moran has a violent scene with his son later that night. Waking the next morning the son is gone, although Moran is usually the first to rise he finds himself alone and reports feeling that he has "been alone for some considerable time." Unable to recall what the altercation was over, he vaguely gestures that it was a common occurrence for them to quarrel, and before changing the subject he adds a few points “in order to make all this sound more likely” (160).
Another interpretation is that A and C are figural iterations of Molloy and Moran: A goes to town while C takes to "by-ways he seemed hardly to know" (9). Then "A or C" the narrator doesn't remember, resigns to go home: "A or C" returns to "the town he had just left" moves "with a kind of loitering indolence" is followed by a Pomeranian, and this sounds incredibly similar to Molloy's second trip into town (11). Tangential to this narrative is possibility that the altercation Moran has with the man in the suit represents the struggle between two personae of himself, the man he kills is the man he used to be, while he goes one as the disheveled tramp with the stick that he becomes. The entire series of interactions between the two men during the interval of his son's absence could signify a quid pro quo of his personality shift, as well as his physical transformation since he ostensibly comes to resemble the man with the stick during his time in the wilderness of Molloy country.

A significant point of congruence, or repetition, between the two halves of the novel involves the mention of a man with a stick. Ostensibly the old man who comes across Moran's camp while he waits for his son to return with a bicycle; a similar figure is mentioned in within the first few pages of the second paragraph where the vantage point of the narrator resembles that from the “crest of a rise” where Moran waits for his son (153).

When the old man arrives, he approaches Moran who reaches out and briefly takes hold of his stick. Moran’s interaction with this man is almost mystical, as if the passing of the stick represents a point of transition where Moran takes on a different persona as he proclaims: “[n]ow it was I who held the stick” before giving it back (146). Following the old man’s departure Moran experiences a dissociative episode. When he
wakes the next day, he has an ominous vision of “a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all
that had always protected me from all I was always condemned to be” (148). He
concedes to a “growing resignation to being dispossessed of self,” and as he ponders his
transformation the text refers to Moran in the third person (149).

As this interval in Moran’s narrative occurs just after he is first struck with a pain
in his leg it marks the beginning of his transformation, indeed, as the first pangs of this
affliction rouse Moran from his sleep they also signal the arousal of Molloy. Testing his
injured leg, the narrator conveys that “it was not so much Moran as another, in the secret
of Moran’s sensations exclusively who said, No change, Moran, no change” (147). That
the text begins to refer to Moran in the third person is also significant, as it indicates the
splitting off and this happens with greater frequency until eventually the association
between the name Moran and the first-person pronoun is dropped altogether. And in the
final paragraph the text declares “I am clearing out” just before the final mention of the
name Moran, which is also voiced from a third person perspective (175). When the man
in the suit arrives, Moran tends to his fire, “poking it with a branch” – now Moran is
literally a man with a stick (149). This is now the third time in this scene when Moran
holds a stick, the first instance arising two days prior, when Moran breaks off a “live
bough” from a tree that he hurls at his son (144).

This is significant because the man with the stick is mentioned in three separate
instances at the beginning of the second paragraph. Not only is this equivalent to the
number of times that Moran is mentioned holding a stick, but the narrator in part I also
takes a forgiving tone towards this figure. Fixating on his innocence for no apparent
reason, the narrator becomes apologetic for the man even needing a stick in the first
place, justifying that the man “saw himself threatened, his body threatened, his body threatened, his reason threatened” (10). This non sequitur, offered up without rhyme or reason, echoes Moran’s rationalization that he would not be punished for murdering the man in the suit, and that Youdi would protect him and not allow him to “be punished for a fault committed in the execution of my duty” (154).

On the one hand we can interpret that Moran actually kills the man in the suit, but on the other we can read this altercation as a psychological representation of the inner conflict that Moran experiences during his transition. The entire scene that occurs may only be the result of a hallucination, or else an account of Moran’s own disintegration and transformation into Molloy. The murder of the man in the suit may only be a symbolic fantasy. Appearing just after Moran’s dissociative episode, and his visage resembles Moran’s own face with the “same little ferrety eyes, same paraphimosis of the nose,” the man in the suit may only be an avatar for the person Moran once was (151). And the man with the stick vaguely resembles Molloy, wearing a coat that is “much too heavy for the time of the year”, his hair a shock of white, his hat “extraordinary” and his face “dirty and hairy” like that of a tramp – or the man that Moran eventually becomes (146).

The idea that Molloy and Moran are the same person is difficult to rule out – and this is precisely what Abbott, or Connor, can not do. To say that something is not there, is of course more difficult, and to displace the burden of proof off on to the reader’s own “obsession for unity” is not a satisfactory argument to dismiss the similarities between Molloy and Moran. For in addition to making an overt assumption of Beckett’s intent, thus shifting the site of unity onto the author, Abbott covers his bases by also shifting the onus onto the reader. While certainly the desire of the reader constitutes a precondition to
any interpretation of a text, and while Abbott’s criticism of the desire for unity may be apt in a more general sense (referring to a certain desire for closure or other sense of unity among some readers and critics), the beauty of some texts resides in their ability to be interpreted in a range of ways.

Permutations of Order

Key for the sections of *Molloy*:
- I = *Molloy* part I in its entirety
- II = *Molloy* part II in its entirety
- Ia = *Molloy* part I pre-Lousse
- Ib = *Molloy* part I post-Lousse
- IIa = *Molloy* part II start to altercation
- IIb = *Molloy* part II return of Gaber to end

At a formal level *Molloy* is a Möbius text. Despite its printed order, its beginning is in the middle and so is its end. Molloy is Moran, or at least who Moran becomes, and the first part of the novel is a second attempt to write a report for Youdi. The first half of the novel roughly accounts for the interval of time between Moran's fight with his son, including his dissociative episode, his trips into town, his time spent at Lousse's, and his altercation with the charcoal burner. Indeed, Moran tells us more than once that he skips over parts of his report, writing that "I shall pass over in silence the fiends in human shape and phantoms of the dead that tried to prevent me from getting home" (166).

The Möbius structure, juxtaposed with the style of the texts (relevant to syntax), suggests the figural transformation of Moran into Molloy through his dissociative episode. The rough syntax, the mixture of memories, the apparent lack of any organization suggests that it is either a report written under extreme duress, or else the
inability to recall memories that have been encoded or destroyed by the conditions of the mental break.

standard: I > II > Malone > Unnamable
reversed: II > I > Malone > Unnamable
reversed modulation: II > Malone > Unnamable > I

This has consequences for the general ordering of the trilogy, if we consider the four narratives as texts that succeed each other in linear order. If we consider the standard order part I precedes part II, Moran is sent out to hunt for Molloy, but the mystery of who Molloy is never resolved. Moran becomes Malone -- who dies -- taking us to the Unnamable. The second possible option follows from the order where part II precedes part I: Moran becomes Molloy, who gets picked up at the edge of the forest and becomes Malone -- who dies -- and then becomes the Voice in *The Unnamable*. A third possible option is that Molly is the last installment of the entire series: as Moran becomes Malone, who doesn't die but has a dissociative episode through *The Unnamable* and goes on to become Molloy. A fourth permutation based off of the third possibility would be to substitute part II for part I so that the Unnamable leads in to Moran's narration, although this seems to make the last amount of sense that doesn't necessarily rule it out, especially considering the relative nonorientability between parts I and II of *Molloy*.

Any of these permutations could form infinite loops, especially sequences that end (in notation) with the Unnamable. Owing to the open-ended nature of *Unnamable* these sequences especially could also link and proceed to other texts, which may or may not come to a terminal end. Any of these sequences could also conceivably reenter the chain of progression at the beginning of any of the other narrations to repeat within the structure of the four narratives in the trilogy to the exclusion of those further up the chain.
For instance the primary sequence of [I > II > Malone > Unnamable] could reenter at part II to the exclusion of part I, or at Malone to the exclusion of I and II, or else form a hermetic loop back to the beginning of Unnamable. After any of these repeated sequences the point of reentry could shift and proceed ad infinitum. Similar permutations of reentry are possible after virtually any narration, although transition from Malone to any other text than Unnamable seems less likely since their relation of embedding is arguably stronger than their relation of plot sequence.

In either standard or reversed order we can still envision the first two narrations of Molloy and Moran as standalone texts, written by two different individuals instead of one, either of which could advance to Malone Dies and then on to The Unnamable. It makes the most sense to preserve the order where Malone precedes the Unnamable since the latter mentions the former by name, but this is not necessary. Further their progression may not be linear but rather the relation between them may be an embedded situation.

I, II > Malone > Unnamable (where I and II are standalone)
II, I > Malone > Unnamable (where I and II are standalone)
II > Malone > Unnamable > I

Before going on, one thing to consider is the possibility of rearranging the texts in order of their succession. The first permutation of order is mentioned in part II where Moran states:

For where Molloy could not be, nor Moran either for that matter, there Moran could bend over Molloy. (111)

Which surprisingly enough gives us the formula for a loop.
I was annexing perhaps already, without my knowing it, to my private Molloy, elements of the Molloy described by Gaber. (115)

Moran’s transformation is unsettling, his ending leaves us unsure of how or why this happens, and we wonder if we might have missed some clue in our first reading. some hint, some key or some device that would lead us to a logical explanation. Perhaps the next novel will have the answers.

*Malone Dies* begins with a third iteration of the same opening frame: a man is in his room writing what ostensibly becomes the text that follows, and we assume that this is what Moran begins to write when he goes back into the house. He does not remember how he got there, surmising that he was brought by “an ambulance perhaps… Having probably lost consciousness somewhere… in a forest” – just like Molloy (183). We learn his name is Malone, and that he went by another name in the past. In the opening paragraph Malone declares “I shall tell myself stories… each one on a different theme” (181). This is redolent of Molloy’s own decree early in part I where he also states ”what I need now is stories” (13). The familiar objects begin to pile up: the crutches, a fondness for stones. If this is what Moran goes back in to write at the end of his narrative, then why does Malone sound more like Molloy? Instead of continuing from the end of *Molloy* the beginning of *Malone Does* feels like it continues from the end of part I, where the final sentence of the second paragraph leaves Molloy “where he happened to be” (91).

The organizing principle of any text is the set of codes by which the text can be interpreted, and the text itself suggests the modes by which it can be understood as such.
For many texts the plot is an organizing principle -- quite literally in quests and stories about what happened on the way home. The metaphor of the protagonist's journey lends itself readily to the progress of events, and even indicates that space can already influence our interpretation of a text. Organizing principles lend to modes of interpretation, and both narratives in Molloy are plot driven as each character travels through the fictional region of Bally: Molloy to his mother's house, and Moran in pursuit of Molloy. At the same time Molloy employs the plot to overturn the narrative conventions that have become expected from the form of the novel, at least from a Formalist perspective. This is evident not only in terms of content, but also in structure. Sense of closure is thwarted as both parts of the novel end without telling us much about the titular character (if that is even really his name), but also structurally as the idea of order is called into question, and on this latter point there is no clear indication if the question of which part goes first is even relevant.

In *Malone Dies* nothing happens. Bedridden he writes his stories, intermingled with his inventories and musings, but he is on his last notebook. Malone awaits his death. "Critical accounts of these three novels often reach for metaphors of distillation, purification or exfoliation to account for the progress from one to the next" as each successive character “suffers a progressive debilitation” (McDonald in Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett 88). Although is tempting to read the trilogy as a series progressing towards death, decay, and dissolution, there is no smooth transition between the novels or their narratives, and as each one comes to an end resolution is thwarted, denouement misplaced, closure denied. Even Malone’s ‘death’ is unsatisfying as it occurs in the middle of a particularly violent scene. Lemuel “raises his hatchet on which the
blood will never dry, but not to hit anyone, he will not hit anyone, he will not hit anyone any more either with it or with it or with it or with or…” and after a few more broken lines of text, the novel ends (288).

If there is one aspect that progresses as we read through the trilogy it is the concepts of nomination and identity. McDonald identifies that the concept of ‘character' is “a misnomer here . . . there is too much porousness between these figures, too much fluidity and uncertainty of identity, too much perplexity, for the unified, stable self implied by the ford 'character’” (McDonald in Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett 88). Names themselves become altogether arbitrary in Malone, and this aspect of the narrative begins to manifest when Saposcat's name is truncated to Sapo. Although this is merely a diminutive gesture, hardly a drastic change. But eventually Sapo’s name changes abruptly to Macmann, just after he is described as wearing a greatcoat and hat that is “attached, by a string, for safety, to the topmost button of the coat” (227-28).

Sapo’s family and the Lamberts are brushed aside and forgotten as Macmann finds himself caught in the rain, lying flat on the ground, rolling around in a plain like Molloy.

Embedded Frames

As the reader progresses from Molloy to Malone Dies the relationship shifts from one of linear plot orientation to the form of embedding. McDonald writes the novels jettison modes of conventional fiction in which a coherent plot and determinate events predominate, they also probe beneath the uniform and integrated individuals who populate such narratives. Here, characters mutate and bleed into one another. The movement is towards ever more asocial and immaterial modes of subjectivity or selfhood. (McDonald in Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett 88)
Instead of a linear progression the trilogy has a structure that resembles the eighth fable of Alfonce (1484) that Scholes identifies in *The Fabulators* (1967), which has two embedded narratives inside the outer frame. The outermost tale is about a master and his student, the middle tale is about a kind and his fabulator, and the innermost tale is about a rich man who goes to market to buy a thousand sheep. The innermost tale is virtually unending, literally a story about counting sheep that the fabulator tells the king in the middle frame, and the outer frame is a story about a student who asks his master to tell him a long fable. The middle tale is "neatly rounded off," ending abruptly when the king simply falls asleep, and the outer tale ends on the verge of completion in anticipation of the disciple’s pacification (Scholes 1979, 8). Obvious albeit serendipitous, parallels arise between the fable of Alfonce and the trilogy: *Molloy* and the innermost tale about the sheep are both virtually infinite, the abrupt ending in the king’s tale mirrors the sudden end of *Malone Dies*, and the outermost tale’s incompleteness even parallels the unresolved status of *Unnamable*. More significant than the resolution at any level is the connotative indication between the fabulator and the master, demonstrating the importance of the former according to the signal indicator of the latter in relation to his student. The enframed or embedded relationship between the fable of Alfonce establish multiple narrative levels that easily lend to the construction of multiple semiotic levels between the three frames/layers of the text.

Boulter identifies a hermeneutic paradigm through the use of Gary Madison *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, and Paul Ricoeur’s “Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation” to discuss the relation between the self-conscious narrator and the self-awareness of the reader produced by the “metanarrative irruption” that initiates a
dialogue of play between the two (2001, 86-88). Boulter’s discussion remains limited to this paradigm, which is precisely what Barthes calls an “association of ideas” referent to the “plenary image” of subjectivity. In S/Z he writes that this level of analysis activates the “deceptive plenitude” in the “wake of all the codes which constitute me, so that my subjectivity has ultimately the generality of stereotypes” (S/Z 10). He warns not to confuse this mode of analysis with the function of connotation “a correlation imminent in the text, in the texts;” or specifically by the “association made by the text- as-subject within its own system” (S/Z 9). Explicitly he defines connotation as: “a determination, a relation, an anaphora, a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or of another text)” (S/Z 8). Connotation leads to polysemy and plurality through the reading of a text, also through a function of play, but absent of the contamination of subjectivity through an identititarian reading. Barthes’ method is topological where the I of signification is “not hidden within the text I am simply irrecoverable from it: my task is to move, to shift systems whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the ‘I’” (S/Z 10).

*Molloy* provides a minimal space to perform such a reading between the two layers of the text, but *Malone Dies* increases the plurality of textual levels since it already has the embedded narratives of Saposcat and Macmann, which readily lend themselves to connotative relationships with the two parts of *Molloy*. Primarily the transition from Sapo to Macmann reinforces the inversion of order between Molloy and Moran's narrations. The "tedium" of the Sapo story matches the tone of Moran's own fastidiousness, and Molloy's own condition bears similarities with Macmann, (216). In addition to Macmann's knife rest, which Abbott points out is obviously Molloy's object of virtu, the
female figure of Moll functions as *indicators* of Molloy's chambermaid as well as Lousse (Abbott 96). The chambermaid and Lousse are *signal indicators*, or simply *signals* – forming a relationship within the same semiotic plane internal to Molloy's narration, but they become *connotators* between Macmann and Molloy’s stories since the relation falls across (or between) the two semiotic planes (see Hjelmslev 137). As Sapo becomes Macmann then the ordering of the Sapo/Macmann tale suggests that part II should precede part I.

Further, Macmann’s story could be a continuation of Molloy’s, albeit shifted to the third person perspective and narrated by Malone. In such an instance the indicators lose their connotative status since the two semiotic levels become integrated, but at this level permutations of order activate between the two narratives. Since Macmann arrives at a hospital or convalescent home, the House of Saint John of God, this could be Lousse’s, as Molloy remarks when leaving “and it seemed to me I was not necessarily going for good and that I might come back one day, by devious winding ways, to the place I was leaving” (59-60). If not a return to Lousse’s, Saint John of God could be where Molloy ends up after he is found at the end of part I. These plot permutations can be represented as such where (I A) is the interval from the beginning of the novel until Molloy comes to Lousse’s and (I B) the interval after his departure.

```
I > Macmann
Ia > Macmann > Ib
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The second permutation is a *pseudo-embedding* since it is functionally an embedding that dissolves as Macmann’s narrative is inserted into the order of Molloy’s.

**Malone as an embedded function**
Following from this plot permutation *Malone Dies* could also be pseudo-embedded in *Molloy*. This is unlikely but completely possible. The man who comes to visit Malone could be Gaber, at the very least Malone has the feeling that he had seen him before, and he suspects that the man is after his exercise book. This also suggests an affinity with Moran, although Malone loves "to finger and caress the hard shapely objects there were there in my deep pockets . . . and I loved to fall asleep holding in my hand a stone" (248).

Malone also mentions the ocean, unlike Moran, and wonders what happens to his clothes, "my greatcoat, my trousers . . . perhaps they were burnt" (251). This is precisely what happens to Molloy's clothes while he is at Lousse's, demanding to know where his clothes have gone the valet returns to inform him that "they had been burnt" (42). This raises the possibility that the entirety of *Malone Dies* is written in the interval of Molloy's stay at Lousse's, collapsing the entire frame into this interval in Molloy's narrative, and rearranging the linear order accordingly.

Indeed as the woman who tends to Malone’s wants and needs bears a similar intent as Lousse, when she proposes to take care of Molloy (185). While at Lousse’s Molloy is also essentially bedridden and does “not wander anymore, anywhere any more, and indeed I scarcely stir at all, and yet nothing is changed. And the confines of my room, of my bed, of my body, are as remote from me as were those of my region, in the days of my splendour” indicating that his current state is that of confinement and decay (pp 66). The man who ransacks Malone’s room could just as likely be looking for the silver that Molloy steals from Lousse’s, including the knife rest (63).

*Ia > Malone > Ib*
and from here we can set this along a linear trajectory that proceeds to Moran and then the Unnamable.

\[ I_a > Malone > I_b > Moran > Unnamable \]

We can either arrange this in the context of a I/II permutation or a II/I permutation, but also produce a third order that reads:

\[ II_a > I_a > Malone > I_b > II_b \]

Taking *The Unnamable* into consideration we can conceive that this is what Moran goes in to write at the end of *Molloy*, which would give us this sequence:

\[ II_a > I_a > Malone > I_b > II_b > Unnamable \]

Despite the apparent similarities between the triad we become suspect that Molloy and Moran are simply the protagonists of two more of his stories: iterations of Saposcat or Macmann, if not semi-autobiographical characters. To be certain there is an indication between both Malone and Molly, as well as Macmann and Molloy, and from this we can pseudo-embed one of the narratives from the second novel into Molloy’s frame and collapse all three narratives into the same plot line.

\[ I_a > Malone > I_b > Macmann \]
\[ I_a > Macmann > I_b > Malone \]

It should be mentioned that Malone's narration could just as easily embed into the interval between Moran's altercation and the return of Gaber. Moran also has a knife-rest and while indications between him and Macmann are not as plentiful they are still there (115). Before Macmann is brought to the St. John of God he is out in the wilderness, crawling around on the ground, stricken with guilt (240).
Plot progression becomes even less significant once we come to *Unnamable* since it is essentially a novel with no plot, insofar as nothing really happens apart from the progression of story vignettes told to us by the Voice. But since the Voice essentially exists in a timeless state, either post mortem or in a nascent state of becoming, all linear progression effectively ends when Malone 'dies.' Even the shifting signification of identity becomes relatively useless to define any sense of progression insofar as we can at least surmise the shifting of identity from Moran (to Molloy) to Malone even as the narrator of each subsequent text indicates the temporary status of these monikers when it refers to each supposed narrator in the third person. The condition that confounds this sense of progression in *Unnamable* is the indication that the narrator is not one voice but a congregation or shifting series of voices. This revelation in fact further disturbs any notion of identity in the other novels of the trilogy.

More relevant in the context of the structural embedding is the movement across frames as the narrators in *Malone* and *Unnamable* claim authorship of the previous texts, but the fact that the Unnamable is an aggregate of voices destabilizes the notion of the authorial narrator since it is impossible to tell who is speaking: Mahood, Basil, Worm, or any of the other personae mentioned by the voice.

The possible permutations of embedding depend on which novel or narrative we take as a *base frame* of orientation, although the possibilities remain somewhat limited if we select *Molloy* as the base. As discussed above the embedding of *Malone* into part I of *Molloy* tends towards a flattening out that dissolves the frames in favor of a linear plot structure. *Malone Dies* is unique among the other novels since it already has an enframed tale that is already embedded in it: the Sapo/Macmann story. Whether we consider these
as two separate embeddings or else one is somewhat arbitrary, and at the minimum
degree we can safely consider these two narratives to be embedded in Malone's narration
since they are already in the diegetic frame of the text. If we want to consider them as
standalone texts enframed by Malone's narration we can represent the situation in
notation accordingly:

Malone [(Sapo)(Macmann)]

and if we want to consider them as embedded narratives that maintain a degree of relation
owing to Sapo's transformation we can represent the situation:

Malone [{Sapo}{Macmann}]

We can also consider the two narrations in Molloy as texts embedded in Malone's
base frame as two more of his stories, even though there are technically extradiegetic to
the text, and they may not actually be his stories but rather two individuals who Malone
has killed. In the latter case they still maintain a minimal degree of an embedded
relationship if only by way of their reference in the text, and this is not a particular point
of contention in this instance. As such we can simply consider them embedded in the
base frame of Malone so that

Malone [{(Molloy){Moran})(Sapo)(Macmann)]

The relational aspects in this notation could be arranged otherwise, so that each
[embedded] narrative could be represented as a (standalone) text or else one that has an
aspect of {relation} with another text.

Permutations of order and even further embedding situations can certainly arise
from this arrangement, for instance since we can postulate the pseudo-embedding
between Molloy and Moran so that Moran enframes Molloy according to the sequence
where Molloy's narration overlaps with the interval beginning with his son's departure and ending with the return of Gaber so that:

\[
\text{Moran [Molloy]}
\]
\[
\text{IIa > I > IIb}
\]

This arrangement can then be embedded in the base frame of Malone's narration so that

\[
\text{Malone [(Moran[Molloy])(Sapo)(Macmann)]}
\]

and in this instance the stories of Sapo and Macmann can exist as standalone stories on their own, or else in binary relation similar (but not necessarily exact) to the Möbius relation between Molloy and Moran so that

\[
\text{Malone [({Molloy}{Moran})({Sapo}{Macmann})]}
\]

A further potential arrangement arises from the base frame where Malone includes all four of these texts as embedded layers, specifically arising from the affinity between Molloy and Macmann, so that Macmann's narrative becomes embedded in the middle of Molloy's instead of Malone's so that

\[
\text{Malone [Moran [Molloy [Macmann]] (Sapo)]}
\]

preserving the linear order according the pseudo-embedding that being with Moran, overlaps at the point of altercation and proceeds until the return of Gaber where Molloy is found in the ditch at the edge of the woods, pseudo-enframing Molloy's narration which then pseudo-enframes Macmann's story in the interval at Lousse’s (instead of Malone's) according to the linear notation

\[
\text{IIa > Ia > Macmann > Ib > IIb}
\]

which can be represented in Malone's base frame accordingly

\[
\text{Malone [Moran {Molloy {Macmann}}(Sapo)]}
\]
As already mentioned it is easier to justify that Malone's narration is embedded in the base frame of the Unnamable than the other way around so that

**Unnamed [Malone [{Molloy}{Moran}](Sapo)(Macmann)]**

Again, the relation of the embedded narratives in Malone's frame are arbitrary in this arrangement. Any of these embedding relationships can be considered either terminal or interminable, so that in the former case the most recent embedding situation's outermost frame is the *Unnamed*, but this does not foreclose the possibility of a true *mise en abyme* where the series does not terminate but continues out or in according to any relations that can be justified according to the text. Inclusion of other texts can be made where deemed appropriate, and finally embedded situations can also be arranged in relation where the base frame takes up a linear plot orientation with another text. For instance, if we wish to read for an embedding situation where the outer frame of the Unnamedable then proceeds to another text like *Worstward Ho* we can simply indicate the arrangement.

**Unnamed [Malone [{Molloy}{Moran}](Sapo)(Macmann)] > WH**

**Iteration**

We have already discussed some of the iterative possibilities that have arisen in context of embedding situations, but we can also consider them in linear successions or else in standalone arrangements. Even though the iteration may suggest a semiotic relationship these arrangements can be activated or ignored according to the reading that one desires to make. Finney identifies that the trilogy already presents different versions of the "the same paradigmatic story," albeit in a progression of reduction in terms of need
or desire, and in increase in physical impediment as the wandering paths of Molloy and Moran give way to the Unnamable's "verbal meanderings" but these relations need not be limited to the trilogy (Finney 851). The text of the trilogy establishes a clear succession of intertextual relationships stretching back to at least Murphy, Boulter recognizes that the aggregate of these texts helps to crate "one large narrative" with other texts (Boulter 2003 108). To be sure, the Voice takes responsibility for all of these tramps in greatcoats, as we are told in Unnamable that “all these stories about travellers, these stories about paralytics: all are mine” (412). But it is not clear if there is a series or a sense of progression through these characters. Or whether these characters are past selves, mere fictions, or inhabitants of a broader universe of characters.

This is the motivating idea behind the analysis that Murphy escapes in to the asylum, at least for a time. Murphy may very well stay in the asylum until he dies, or he might get bored and decide to leave, or he might be discovered and ejected. Just Murphy mentions Watt, along with the texts of the trilogy, he suddenly appears in the last chapter of Mercier and Camier. Upon meeting him Mercier observes: “I knew a poor man named Murphy… who had a look of you, only less battered of course. But he died ten years ago, in rather mysterious circumstances. They never found the body, can you imagine. My dream, said Watt” (87). And in this instance we aren’t even sure if this is the real Watt. Compared to the individual who appears in the eponymous novel this manifestation of Watt is articulate and outgoing and could very well be Murphy masquerading as Watt.

That Moran insinuates that he has hunted down “Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and all the others” in his “gallery of moribunds” suggests that Murphy does indeed survive long enough to meet an unknown fate (137). What these texts give us is not a
series of stories, or even a collection of plot lines, but rather a terrain that is mapped out over a series of novels. A world populated by tramps in greatcoats who wander the countryside on byways and sequestered paths: on bikes or on foot, with or without crutches. Who then go into rooms to write their stories, and wait to die, "unless it goes on beyond the grave" (236). Or else to “go on” like the Voice at the end of Unnamable, who insinuates that these personae were past selves as much as stories of its narration.

A primary iteration that becomes a definite motif in this series are tramps who enter and exit mental hospitals or convalescent homes out in the country. For instance, Watt gets a job at Mr. Knott's house replacing Arsene, and is replaced by Micks in an iteration of the quid pro quo between Ticklepenny, Murphy and then whoever replaces them. Although on a purely denotative level the standard assumption is that Murphy dies in the conflagration towards the end of his novel, the text suggests another dimension of the quid pro quo through the chess game as well as the other aspects discussed in the ADDENDA. Comparison to the iterative motif in Watt strengthens this reading, insofar as it also includes a quid pro quo scenario, which may suggest that Murphy escapes the conflagration by faking his own death even though there is not a similar conflict at the denotative level in Watt. Although the very fact that this structure repeats suggests the probability that things could and are likely otherwise, if only for the sake of variation, but this does not foreclose the possibilities of similar outcomes under different circumstances. All things being equal it is just as facile to simply assume something does or doesn't happen in a permutation series because it did or didn't already happen. The identification of a modal structure across texts, or within a single text, merely suggests the possibility, not the necessity. To be sure, patterns can seem to
emerge even where they don't exist according to the influence of one's desire, and in such instances it is always prudent to analyze the relationships and significations within the text itself rather than relying on a preliminary formal comparison. Indications of affinity serve as an excellent point to begin a deeper investigation but should not be considered a terminal step in themselves. In the absence of a thorough interrogation of the subject matter the analysis is simply incomplete. Analysis of form and structure can be a starting point for a closer reading, especially when considering the text in ways that challenge convention.

But where does it go on to? The region is vast, far larger than the first trilogy which is incredibly dense and available to an astonishing range of readings. These are not the only iterations or motifs that extend across the range of texts, but this is not an exhaustive reading. In addition to Beckett’s fictions, Abbott points out there are clearly comparisons to make across media formats into Beckett's plays. Although these comparisons might be more thematic and superficial, the fictions give is a dense body of work with a definite range of modal permutations, iterations, and connotative functions yet to be discovered and elaborated. Although, failure is always an option, there is a difference between making a reading and forcing one.

§

In the first part of *Molloy* the text populates with tangents and musings that arise out of nowhere, only to be dropped just as quickly and/or then picked back up again. Although these derives may initially seem to be frenetic or random departures from the narrator’s attempt to describe how he got to his mother’s room. Upon further repetition
some of these missives develop into tropes or motifs with progressions of their own. As some subjects are revisited in a cyclical fashion, this effect is present in all three of the novels: Molloy makes numerous references to A and C, and he makes several references to his sucking stones which are themselves circulated in Molloy’s pockets “turn and turn about” (70); and The Unnamable avers that “all things here recur sooner or later” (299).

While some of these repetitions are limited to the specific novel in which they appear, others such as the moon and circular motion permeate the trilogy, as can be seen by reading these sections from Molloy and Unnamable. While these exist in different novels the similarity in these sections would suggest that they are clearly parts of the same text. In Molly these tropes become the elements which join and hold the different parts of Molloy’s story together, very much so as the language of cycling and travelling in circles are often made in points of transition between one episode and the next. To this effect these mentions are easily overlooked, especially if one’s approach is to read for the plot or focus on the events that the text describes instead of the language of the text itself. … and while these passages are not particularly necessary to the first part of Molloy, they provide common elements shared between Molloy and Unnamable.

**Branching and Repetition**

Other possibilities of form include branching, and cutting, although there are certainly others to consider. Branching implies a degree of simultaneity insofar as multiple paths emit from a specific node and remain there regardless of whether or not they are read at this time. ‘Time’ itself under such circumstances refers to the time of reading, not the time of the text or narrative formation which for all intents and purposes
is a topological time: one that stands outside of linear time and occurs in a different set of dimensions.

Another thing that we must consider is the possibility of branchings, or divergent plot directions from the same point. Indeed, since we are already considering the nonlinear direction of embedding which adds another direction of movement to the act of reading. Functionally this means that embeddings need not integrate within the same plot line in a collapse between two semiotic levels, the levels can still exist as such in virtual space. Any point where two possible directions can be articulated is functionally a node in the text, a point that can be revisited and returned to as the indications of the text allow.

A road is a line, both Molloy and Moran stay off the road and wander far afield, indeed is while he is in the wilderness that Moran’s transformation takes place and he begins to resemble Molloy. A plot is just one line, one potential path to travel through a text. In “Typologie du roman policier” (1966) Todorov indicates that fabula and sujet characterize “two aspects of the same story” he seems to be talking about points of view, but we can also conceive of simultaneous other paths, orderings, movements of characters through the same instance of time and space (Poetics of Prose 1977 45-46). A more refined example of this occurs in Mrs. Dalloway, Peter wanders up from Clarissa’s house to Regent’s Park, Septimus and Rezia are already there. Characters can cross paths through the space of narrative, they can arrive and depart from the same place on the same roads, or on different roads. Or they can even leave the road like Moran and Molloy do. If a main road is a metaphor for a plot line it can bring us to the same place over and over again, as well as function as a point of departure, apparently ditches too).
In discussing the similarities between *Molloy* and the *Odyssey* K. J. Phillips calls attention to the scene where Molloy awakens in the ditch to find the shepherd standing over him. Specifically, he draws a connection to Odysseus’ descent into the underworld where he digs a trench and summons the dead with the blood a black ram, and indeed when Molloy awakens to see the Shepherd standing over him he compares himself with the image of a black sheep (28). It would seem the ditch becomes a portal for Molly, one that he finds himself both at the beginning and the end of the digression that sidetracks him from reaching his mother’s house. Connor alights on this scene in a discussion of the repetitions between the two halves of the novel, identifying it as “the most obvious and extended” recurrence in the text (58). At the same time, he notes the differences: Molloy interacts with the Shepherd in the morning, Moran in the evening; Molloy talks to the Shepherd and at least receives a verbal reply (even if Molloy is unsure if he is talking to his dog instead), Moran does not. Both Phillips and Connor note the mist “which rises in [Molloy] every day and veils the world from me and veils me from myself” (*Three Novels* 29), and Phillips draws a connection to the “City of Perpetual Mist” in the *Odyssey* which becomes obvious once it is made (20).

The time of day is insignificant insofar as “the tramp” encounters the Shepherd twice, he obviously sees him twice. This can explain why the Shepherd was so curt with Moran in their interaction since it raises the possibility that they had met each other already that morning. Even as Moran arrives in the ditch on his way in from the wilderness, and Molloy gets there on his way from the city, this could be a third encounter with the Shepherd. Or Moran’s encounter could be first and Molloy’s second, regardless this is clearly a point of departure where Moran and Molloy transition.
Cutting and Suturing

Cutting and suturing is the other possibility, as has been suggested in the case of pseudo-embeddings where a new signifying articulation is created by the insertion of one part or layer of a text into another to form a new permutation of order. The trilogy offers several optimal points or gaps in which to insert other sections, and even suggests it in places that overlap or seem to relate the same content: the man with the stick in Molloy serves as a perfect example of a connotative indicator that suggest the conjoining of two semiotic levels into the same plane. However, cuts can be made virtually anywhere and while some arrangements are suggested by the text itself others can be forced. There is nothing wrong with forcing an articulation since this offers the possibility to create new statements, semiotic levels, etc. but this can also result in nonsense statements or statements that clearly do not generate any meaning but rather are perfectly unreadable.

Another possible articulation is this is folding and quilting, and to some degree this is what we already do when we perform a close reading of a text: whereby we analyze two different sections of a text that exist at a distance from each other. We bring those two (or more) sections together and “fix” them with a “quilting point” that creates a stable articulation between two levels, stopping the sliding of signification. In some respect this is a signal indication since the indication occurs within the same semiotic level, however since it pragmatically articulates the same level in context with itself to “create” two different layers this indication is potentially connotative. The precise nature of this determination will need to be considered at some point, but for now it is sufficient to consider the possibility of pseudo-connotative semiotic relation.
In any case the realization of an *indication* can create a new signifying articulation that can then produce a sign that then becomes a signifier that can enter into an articulation that can then be used to produce a new *connotative* statement. For instance the signifier “moon” at the denotative level of the text can be selected to indicate an articulation between two *lexies* or minimum units of reading, enter into a new horizontal articulation as signifiers themselves in an entirely new “sentence” or articulation of meaning that becomes a denotative level for the production of a subsequent sign (Logan 71, see also *S/Z* 13). Between any two levels in this arrangement connotative semiotic indications can be made to produce a surplus of meaning within the text itself that was always possible, but never actualized. The *lexia* need not be a signifier but can be a trope, motif, image, etc.: some unit of reading that can be put into articulation with others to form new articulations in a text. The remainder of this chapter will perform such a reading.

*The Endless Screw*

*This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, then I think it’ll be over...* (8)

In the French text of *Molloy* the first three sentences read as follows:

Je suis dans la chambre de ma mère. C’est moi qui y vis maintenant. Je ne sais pas comment j’y suis arrivé. (7)

In the English:

I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now. I don’t know how I got there. (7)
Several problems arise from this translation. In the first place it turns an object pronoun into a subject pronoun, and in doing so this changes the *subject, object, subject* variance of the personal pronouns in the first three sentences into a *subject, subject, subject* uniformity, so that the ‘rhythm’ of the *je, moi, je* get homogenized into a flat series of signifiers *I, I, I*.

In translation the French subject pronoun *je* is strictly equivalent to the English pronoun *I*, while by itself *moi* is primarily translated as the first person object pronoun *me*. The French disjunctive pronoun *C’est moi* is commonly translated into English as *It is I* for grammatical reasons, as it would simply sound clumsy to translate the second sentence as: *It is me who live there now*. Nevertheless, *moi* can be translated into English as either *me* or *I* depending on its usage in context and syntax.

The loss of the disjunction also removes an emphasis that is present in the French since *C’est moi* is a stressed or emphatic pronoun. Although there is no direct correlative for the disjunctive or emphatic form in English, this emphasis is normally represented by the intensive form (myself, yourself, etc.), and it should be noted that the intensive form is used correctly in place of the emphatic *moi* shortly hereafter in the same paragraph: “Il serait vieux maintenant, presque autant que *moi*” (8 my italics); “He would be old now, nearly as old as *myself*” (7 my italics). And again in the following pages:

Mais un homme, à plus forte raison *moi*, ça ne fait pas exactement partie des caractéristiques d’un chemin, car. (13 my italics)

Which translates:

But a man, a fortiori *myself*, isn’t exactly the characteristics of a path, because. (10 my italics)
While these instances do not come at the beginning of a sentence, but rather follow a preposition and a prepositional phrase respectively, they are both still examples where a disjunctive *moi* translates into an intensive form (and similar instances will continue from here on).

The emphatic position\(^9\) would be preserved in the second sentence were it to read *I myself live there now*, but this would not be as close of a word-for-word translation. It would also end up changing the second pronoun, the *qui* or *who*, and not the first. The sentence could read *It’s I myself who lives there now*, or *It’s I (myself) who lives there now*. Just a few pages on there is a parenthetical insertion of an intensive *myself* in the English that is not present in the French text: “Je le regardai s’égarder, gagné par son inquietude,” (12); “I watched him recede, overtaken (myself) by his anxiety” (10). Although in this case the presence of the intensive form is implied prepositionally by the *par son*. Even were the sentence to begin *It is I* this emphasis could arguably be conveyed by virtue of its correct grammar, albeit in a less distinct manner, but the elocutionary diction would give the sentence a crispness that might demand greater attention. By comparison the conjunction of *It is* into *It’s* makes the sentence read slack and casual.

While it is true that *c’est* is a conjunction of *ce est* or *it is*, the import of informality is not the same as when a conjunction is made in English. and so its usage here does not indicate a casual tone. Irrelevant to the syntax of printed text, the conjunction in *c’est* originates in the spoken meter of French in order to avoid a hiatus between the vowel sound made by the *e* at the end of *ce* and the beginning of *est*. As the unstressed /ə/ sound of the former is elided in favor of voicing the vowel sound /ɛ/ at the
beginning of the latter. This conjunction is in fact grammatically correct, and the preferred usage even in the most formal of instances.

Since c’est moi is an emphatic pronoun it calls attention to the second sentence where, upon further scrutiny, we can also see that there exists a potential pun in French that is not even possible to translate into English. In addition to being the present participle of the verb vivre, vis literally translates as “screw,” as in the simple machine, a wood screw, etc. Vis can also be used idiomatically; serrer la vis à qn which means to tighten the screws on someone in an attempt of coercion (OHD 896). Given this the second sentence of Molloy could also literally be translated into English to read It is I who screw there now.10

Perhaps this is just a perverse translation. Perhaps a coincidence. Perhaps a dirty joke that we wouldn’t see coming the first time, and even perhaps the second time too. A lurid interpretation to be sure, but it would not be the only lewd reference in the text. And if we are to take a suggestion from Unnamable “no stone must be left unturned, one mustn’t be afraid of making a howler, how can one know it is one before it’s made” (379)? But perhaps it’s not a funny joke, or not even a joke at all?

This could just as easily be a fair warning of what’s to come. A warning we don’t realize is a warning the first time we read it. A gentle nudge, one of those moments of “conditioning” by an element “quite common in ordinary speech” but which “if taken literally,” becomes an indication of some fantastical element in the text (Fantastic 79-80). If we do take this to be an equivoque; as far as who or what is being screwed, or screwed with? The short answer would be everything, including the reader! But this might not be immediately apparent upon a first reading of the text. Especially here, at this point in the
second sentence, of the first paragraph, of the first book in a trilogy. Yet to turn the page, yet to begin the second paragraph.

As far as opening up the potential for such wordplay, the text itself makes overt reference to *Finnegan’s Wake*, and the polysemy of the French language alone makes the occasional entendre impossible to avoid. If we wanted to veer off into the realm of speculative fiction we could imagine Beckett’s decision to write the trilogy in French as an opportunity to thumb his nose at the prevailing conservatism of Ireland and England while at the same time utilizing the benefits of working with a language more pliable than English. Taken in this light the word choice of the second sentence in the French text could just be a wry indication that *there will be puns here too, but they’ll be in French!*

Perhaps not.

A less salacious alternate translation of *vis* is *worm* when it appears in the compound term *vis sans fin*. Literally a *worm without end*, or *endless screw* [OHD], also known in English as a “worm drive,” or “wheel and worm.” Such a mechanism is used to convert the rotational motion of the worm or screw into a translational motion of a gear (or vice versa) whose rotation is oriented in an intersecting plane, and is perhaps most easily recognizable at the tuning end of stringed instruments. Similar mechanisms are also employed in centrifuges, winches, bridges and automotive differentials, etc.

![Endless Screw](image)

*Figure 1.3 vis sans fin*
“Worm” is also one of the “surrogates” mentioned in *The Unnamable*. The reference may be oblique, as the word is literally a capitalized proper noun in both the English and French editions, but the association should not be overlooked. Description of circular or rotational movement becomes a trope throughout the trilogy, and there are numerous instances in the trilogy where parts of the text overlap or come to re-signify earlier parts of the text.

More prominent as a trope in *Unnamable*, the first mention of circular or rotational movement occurs in the fifth paragraph in reference to Malone who “appears and disappears with the punctuality of clockwork, always at the same remove, the same velocity, in the same direction the same attitude… wheeling about me as he does” (294-95). While there is some confusion on the narrator’s part as to whether it is located at the center or circumference in relation to Malone’s arc of movement, the description is at least consistent with what we are told two paragraphs earlier that Malone “passes before me at doubtless regular intervals… a few feet away, slowly, always in the same direction” (292). From this language we could easily imagine Malone “wheeling about” like a rider on a carousel as he passes by the narrating pronoun.

This narrating voice also contemplates that “it is equally possible, I do not deny it, that I too am in perpetual motion, accompanied by Malone, as the earth by the moon” (295). The lunar reference here in *Unnamable* is strikingly similar to a passage in *Molloy* where the narrator looks out at the sky from his room at Lousse’s house to notice “there was a huge moon framed in the window.” Contemplating the lunar progressions in relation to his own point of view:

the moon was moving from right to left, or the room was moving from right to left, or both together perhaps, or both were moving from left to
right, but the room not so fast as the moon, or from right to left, but the moon not so fast as the room. But can one speak of right and left in such circumstances. That movements of an extreme complexity were taking place seemed certain, and yet what a simple thing it seemed, (39)

While the language in either of these mentions of the moon does not explicitly describe a *vis sans fin* we might consider that either the language of the text, if not our application of this mechanical example, is more of a metonymic function than a literal metaphor. It is always too easy to approach a text with a pre-conceived rubric and find what one is looking for, just as one should not be shocked if they put a rock behind a bush and then proceed to find it there later on when they look behind that same bush. Although it should also be said that the application of this example is warranted by the language of the text itself, and for that reason it should not be casually dismissed. The salient point for the moment being the description to two bodies moving in their own circular and/or rotational manner in relative proximity to one another.

The movements of the earth and moon are not coplanar, at least in Euclidean space. The moon orbits the earth on a plane that is oblique to both the orbital plane of the earth (around the sun) as well as the equatorial plane in which the earth rotates. While the earth and moon both rotate around their own independent axes the planes of these axes are closer to being aligned in parallel than perpendicular to one another, but they do maintain a synchronous rotation.

As the moon takes 27 days to rotate once on its own axis it also takes the moon 27.322 days to complete one orbit around the earth. From a point of view from the earth’s surface this makes it seem like the moon doesn’t rotate at all, since the synchronicity of these cycles ensures that the same hemisphere of the moon always faces the earth. And so while an acknowledged uncertainty pervades these examples, what is certain is that
movements of an extreme complexity do indeed seem to be taking place both in the
events depicted in the texts themselves.

§

The next mention of gyral movement in Molloy comes when the narrator departs
from Lousse’s. Continuing on his journey to his mother’s Molloy resolves to plot a
course heading “towards the sun” in order to head towards the East, “in theory” (62).
While acknowledging that the sun will be a moving target that crosses the sky as the day
 progresses he paradoxically concludes that the best way to proceed “in a straight line” is
to aim himself in a curved path, in order to compensate for “the drift to the right of the
 feeble light which was my guide” (65, 62). As the text affirms “my pertinancy was such
that I did indeed come to the ramparts as night was fading, having described a good
quarter of a circle, through bad navigation” (65). While resting shortly hereafter he
abstractly attributes his progress “to the buckled wheel that carried me, in unforeseeable
jerks” (66), and after resting he resumes his “spirals” (68).

As the first half of the novel nears its end Molloy comes to a forest where he
contemplates:

having heard, or more probably read somewhere, … that when a man in a
forest thinks he is going in a straight line, in reality he is going in a circle,
I did my best to go in a circle, hoping in this way to go in a straight line.
… And if I did not go in a rigorous straight line, with my system of going
in a circle, at least I did not go in a circle, and that was something. And by
going on doing this, day after day, and night after night, I looked forward
to getting out of the forest, some day. (85)

A feat which he does eventually accomplish, although to do so he exchanges one type of
circular motion for another. Abandoning the upright position altogether, Molloy’s exit
from the forest is brought about “crawling on his belly, like a reptile,” – or perhaps a worm – turning at times to crawl along on his back through the undergrowth and the “black slush of leaves” that had hampered his ambulation and lead him to consider crawling in the first place (89-90). As the text reads

But there was always present in my mind, which was still working, if laboriously, the need to turn, to keep on turning, and every three or four jerks I altered course, which permitted me to describe, if not a circle, at least a great polygon, perfection is not of this world, and to hope that I was going forward in a straight line, in spite of everything, day and night, towards my mother. (90).

Eventually the forest gives way to a moor which he crawls across until he finds himself in a ditch where he wonders “Would they let me roll on to my mother’s door?” (91)

The language in these instances is strikingly similar to a passage in *Unnamable* where the voice describes a character “hobbling through a nature,” with the aid of a pair of crutches, just like Molloy. As the text reads

I had already advanced a good ten paces, if one may call them paces, not in a straight line I need hardly to say, but in a sharp curve which, if I continued to follow it, seemed likely to restore me to my point of departure, or to one adjacent, I must have got embroiled in a kind of inverted spiral, I mean one the coils of which, instead of widening more and more, grew narrower and narrower and finally, given the kind of space in which I was supposed to evolve, would come to an end for lack of room. Faced then with the material impossibility of going any further I should no doubt have had to stop, unless of course I elected to set off again at once in the opposite direction, to unscrew myself as it were, after having screwed myself to a standstill. (316)

For the moment it is enough to bring attention to the obvious similarities between these two passages where the figural language strikes an uncanny description of the *vis sans fin*. Molloy turns like a screw as he advances through the undergrowth of the forest, and when the voice mentions being restored to its “point of departure, or to one adjacent,” this passage might as well describe the threads of a worm drive.
In a *vis san fin* the worm can literally spin an infinite number of times around its own axis of rotation and yet remain in a fixed location relative to its surrounding components. Any given point on the surface will literally return to the same exact spatial coordinates, and yet from the correct perspective the illusion of forward motion can be appreciated as the threads of the worm screw appear to “advance” into the adjacent space between the cogs of the gear. But it is really the wheel that is advanced by the worm, the latter does not actually go anywhere, except in the same circle following the same axis of rotation. Like someone who is lost in the forest moving in the same circuitous path, unaware that he is even traveling in a circle, such motion could all too easily become mistaken for progress – the ability to make a more precise distinction made virtually impossible by the blind spot of observer position from which it is made. And just as the worm can be brought to a stop and then turned in the opposite direction (to move the wheel accordingly), a few sentences on the voice wonders “if by dint of winding myself up I must inevitably find myself stuck in the end, once launched in the opposite direction should I not normally unfold ad infinitum, *with no possibility of ever stopping*” – like a worm without end (317 my italics). Like a reading without end, like an endless cycle of repetition, modulation, embedding, branching. Three novels with a minimum of six narratives: Molloy, Moran, Malone, Sapo, Macmann, the Unnamable voice. Seven, if you count Yerk, and even more if you expand to the other novels or begin to apply the *Textes pour rien*. All which can be linked up in an endless arrangement.

This last passage from *Unnamable* is also another instance where the English translation deviates from the French, especially in the clause “given the kind of space in which I was supposed to evolve.” In French the text reads:
Je m'étais probablement empêtré dans une sorte de spirale renversée, je veux dire dont les bocles, au lieu de prendre de plus en plus d'ampleur, devaient aller en rétrécissant, jusqu'à ne plus pouvoir se poursuivre, *vu l'espace d'espèce où j'étais censé me trouver*. A ce moment-là, dans l'impossibilité matérielle d'aller plus loin, j'aurais été sans doute obligé de m'arrêter, (79-80, my italics)

The clause *vu l'espace d'espèce où j'étais censé me trouver*, should read closer to *given the space in which I was supposed to find myself*; a translation which gives quite a different import to the text than what appears in the English edition. Evolution is one thing, and while ‘finding one’s self’ might suggest an ‘evolution’ of sorts, were one disposed to a psychological discourse of ‘self actualization’ or that operated under the aegis of some overexuberantly humanist ‘hierarchy of needs.’ But “evolve” does not carry the same polyvalence as *trouver* which can also mean: to discover, to catch to break or crack a code, to solve a problem, to find that something exists, to find oneself. And the French text does not read *me évoluer*, it reads *me trouver: to find me.*

Ostensibly the term “evolution” is derived from the wordplay in the phrase: *l'espace d'espèce, or the space of the species* or *a species of space as in a kind of space.* This clause alone contains several entendres that opens up a menu of meanings not possible in English: *ou* alone is *or* but with the accent grave over the “u” can be the adverb *where*, the conjunction *wherein*, or as the pronoun *that*; *j'étais*, or *I was*, being the first person imperfect conjugation of the verb *être* (“to be” but also “being” in either a personal or existential sense), is an equivoque of the imperfect conjugation of *jeter* which can mean *throw, discard, or even throw up; étayer* is also an equivoque with the verb *étayer* which means to *support* but also *shore (up)* and *underpin*. Given the potential polyvalence in the French, this clause could also be read *given the space of the species (or being / where I was thrown into) supposedly to find myself.* And in addition to all of
the potential meanings lost by translating this clause into English, the object pronoun *me* is also dropped or subsumed into the subject pronoun *I* – subjectifying an object yet again – just as is done in the second sentence of *Molloy*. And we aren’t even speaking yet…

§ Who is *I*?

One question begged by this analysis, and indeed by the text itself, is who says “*I*”? We take it for granted that we are dealing with the titular character in the first half of the novel, but this is far from certain. Around the tenth page into *Molloy* we come to learn that the narrator’s name is “not Dan” (17), but it isn’t until several pages on when the protagonist is brought into the police station that we come to learn that his name is Molloy. Although there is a preponderance of doubt in this situation as to whether this is actually his real name, as he lacks any form of identification and on the way to the police station he stops for a moment to listen to music that he hears in the distance and comments “*I* gave myself up-to that golden moment, as if *I* had been someone else” (21).

Molloy clearly struggles with verbal communication, and if we are to take the text of the first half of the novel to be an indication of his written acumen then it is safe to say that the standard codes of language and syntax are something that he struggles at. When he is first stopped by the policeman the text notes that when put to question he easily becomes confabulated and will “honestly believe *I* have answered the question *I* am asked and in reality *I* do nothing of the kind” (20).

His interrogation at the station does not begin well either, as the official he is brought before begins by questioning him “in a tone which, from the point of view of civility, left increasingly to be desired, in my opinion” (21). This puts Molloy on the
defensive, and much to the consternation of the officer, when pressed to identify himself he is at first unable to remember his surname. Molloy does nothing to help the situation either as he continues that “Between his questions and my answers, I mean those deserving of consideration, the intervals were more or less long and turbulent” (21). The most the interrogation yields is the information that Molloy is headed to his mother’s house, although he does not remember the address and is not sure if the area is the specifically nearer to the shambles or the cattle-markets. But to Molloy such details are superfluous as he claims that he knows how to get there “even in the dark” (22).

Exasperated, the policemen ignore him for a moment to confer among themselves, and it is in this lull that “suddenly I remembered my name, Molloy. My name is Molloy,” he cries out (22). But just prior to this revelation the narrator discloses a propensity to “hasten to answer blindly, fearing perhaps lest my silence fan their anger to fury” (22). Although this answer is volunteered after a few “kind words” which help to put him at ease, the text immediately calls the veracity of this answer into question as it notes that “nothing compelled me to give this information, but I gave it, hoping to please I suppose” (22-23).

While he is eventually able to make himself understood at the police station he fares far worse elsewhere. When he meets the shepherd at the edge of town, Molloy asks him where he is taking his sheep. “But whether it was he didn’t understand, or didn’t want to reply, he didn’t reply, but went on his way without a word, without a word for me I mean,” as the text acknowledges that the shepherd does speak to his dog (28-29). Given his tendency to confabulation it is entirely possible that Molloy could also ask questions without actually uttering them, perhaps hallucinating them. In addition to his attempted
effort to talk to the shepherd he also fails to communicate with the charcoal burner in the woods, who at least acknowledges and responds to Molloy’s query as to the way out of the forest. Although these replies become “exceedingly confused” as “either I didn’t understand a word he said, or he didn’t understand a word I said” (84). In fact, apart from when he is at Lousse’s, Molloy is unable to communicate with anyone outside of town at all.

In addition to his relative inability to communicate Molloy’s identity is also contingent on his physical location with the city literally functioning as the locus of the symbolic order. Here it should be noted he actually does not identify himself as “Molloy” until he is brought in before the apparatus of the law. Further, all other usage of this name follows this episode, and then only in moments of analeptic commentary. Molloy’s relationship with language is so fraught that his reentry into symbolic space (or failure thereof) is quite literal as he moves from the countryside into to city, and even still his reintegration is not without difficulty.

He acknowledges that he “had been living so far from words so long” that he claims to have forgotten the name of his own town, even though it is the only town he had ever been in. He cannot even remember if it “began with a B or a P but in spite of this clue, or perhaps because of its falsity, the other letters continued to escape me” (31). As he enters a town, one he is unsure is even his, he confers that

even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate, as we have just seen I think. And so on for all the other things which made merry with my senses. Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now, but after all what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, fouly named. (31).
It is as if the very fabric of the universe were turned inside out for Molloy to reveal the seams of reality. The world becomes one of "nameless things" and as the particle/wave duality of the universe is revealed to him names become arbitrary, and reality itself becomes contingent upon the symbolic system used to describe it.

A world of thingless names and not just an identity that is thingless, but also a false notion of being. Matter becomes something that arises from nothingness only to fade back into nothing. If all is just energy in various states of configuration then difference becomes arbitrary as well. Things for which there is no name may still exist, but if their identity is secret or presence withdrawn then who would know where or what to look for?

The French text reads

De même la sensation de ma personne s’enveloppait d’un anonymat souvent difficile à percer, nous venons de le voir je crois. Et ainsi de suite pur les autres choses qui me bafouaient les sens. Oui, même à cette époque, où tout s’estompait déjà, ondes et particules, la condition de l’objet était d’être sans nom, et inversement. Je dis ça maintenant, mais au fond qu’en sais-je maintenant, de cette époque, maintenant que grêlent sur moi les mots glacés de sens et que le monde meurt aussi, lâchement, lourdement nommé? (45-46)

Which could be retranslated

In the same way the sensation of my person was enveloped by an anonymity often difficult to break through, we have just seen it I believe. And so on for the other things that flouted my senses. Yes, even at that time, when everything was already fading, waves and particles, the condition of the object was of being without name, and vice versa. I say that now, but in the end what do I know now, of that time, now that hails on me the words frozen of meaning and the world dies also, cowardly, heavily named? (my translation)

His very identity is flouted: defied, disregarded, mocked, repudiated, scorned, spurned, openly disregarded; not made merry of or celebrated. Not only his sense of reality,
self, but also his sense of being becomes revealed as a dead concept. Not just a being without name, a signifier without a signified, but a name without being, *un nom sans être*, a repudiation of the very concept itself. Saying is not inventing.

In addition to *cowardly*, *lâchement* can also be translated as *loosely* or *slackly* which would suggest a slippage of meaning between signifier and signified. Indeed, as language is an incomplete set open to the *glissment* or slippage of meaning. As Lacan formulates that the “subject determined by language and speech… is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other” that is, in language by being named, but also as a speaking being. By this very fact, this subject – which was previously nothing if not a subject coming into being – solidifies into a signifier” under the gaze of the Other (*Seminar 11*, 198-99). In effect the entry into the symbolic domain of the Other in this fashion causes a division of that individual so that “when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as ‘fading’, as disappearance” and so as he becomes “Molloy” perhaps he does cease to be who he was, giving himself up to become someone else in both name and deed.

Lacan identifies this function in the process of aphanisis: a “*fading of the subject*”(11: 208). There is “a matter of life and death between the unary signifier” on which the subject’s self-identification is based and “the subject” as manifest in the field of the other (*II*, 218). This “matter of life and death” is an operation equivalent to the Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, by which the human subject experiences the “primary alienation” from itself as it must choose between “*being or meaning*” with the former term being used in a loose sense of the term (11: 212, 246).
And yet he knows himself better through mathematics, by calculating the number of farts he makes per minute (30). This would actually suggest that his sense of self is more corporeal than linguistic, but even then he admits to forgetting whether it is his right or left leg which is the bad one (35). And while this confusion may be due to a linguistic failing, it is one so rudimentary that it is almost hard to fathom. The simple binary difference between left and right is so basic, so cardinal, that their apparent confusion suggests a cognitive impairment, and left-right confusion is often prevalent among individuals who are diagnosed with: dyslexia, dyscalculia, visual processing issues/disorders (VPD), and nonverbal learning disabilities (NVLD) which include the inability to understand sarcasm and conduct abstract reasoning tasks.

To read his identity metaphorically as bodily is to say that his is an existence propped up by a crutch or prosthetic apparatus of someone else’s making. If his self-identity is corporeal then it is one in a state of constant decay as he acknowledges the state of “decrepitude” his body is in (90), or else defined according to its abject qualities. Veritably, as when the policeman asks him for his papers he produced the scraps of newsprint that he uses to wipe himself with (20).

His symbolic sense of self is alienated from his body, and yet both are disintegrated from his consciousness as the text states elsewhere [as he begins to drift off to sleep]

… I had forgotten who I was (excusably) and spoken of myself as I would have of another, if I had been compelled to speak of another. Yes it sometimes happens and will sometimes happen again that I will forget who I am and strut before my eyes, like a stranger. (42)

This reference to one’s self passing or strutting “before my eyes” is strikingly similar to the excerpt from Unnamable (above) where the voice describes Malone – or perhaps
“Molloy, wearing Malone’s hat” (292-93) – passing in front of its position of observation. [But] This passage also raises the question regarding the relationship between consciousness and identity. Like Zhuangzi who dreamt that he was a butterfly, but upon waking suddenly wondered if he was not really a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuangzi (XI: 76). Molloy may just be a waking dream as earlier he remarks that “you don’t remember immediately who you are, when you wake” (38).

This is not the only instance that Molloy refers to himself as an other (to himself), in the third person. After leaving the police station he comes to the canal bank outside of town where, not immediately recognizing the landscape, he attempts to allay the fear that he is lost by muttering to himself “don’t torment yourself, Molloy” (28). Some of these references to third person are metaleptic comments delivered from the vantage point established at the beginning of the text: his mother’s room. For instance a few pages on the narrator continues to recall the scene at the canal he relates “when I try and think of that night, on the canal-bank, I find nothing, no night properly speaking, nothing but Molloy in the ditch” (28). But then there are other instance which are not so innocuous, such as when the narrator makes the observation: “Chameleon in spite of himself, there you have Molloy, viewed from a certain angle” (30). The latter example which suggest a propensity for deception and demonstrates a capability to camouflage himself instantaneously and “in spite of himself”; if not as a reflex then as an unconscious function. From this perspective the sudden remembrance of his name becomes a parapraxis, and the name “Molloy” a shibboleth that quickly reverses his fortune and secures his freedom.
The text also makes a quizzical mention to “the Aegean,” who “thirsting for heat and light, him I killed, he killed himself, early on in me” (30) which suggests that there is not only a dichotomy between Molloy’s inner and outer self, but also a prior disjuncture and violent internal conflict. K.J. Phillips interprets this passage as a reference to Homer’s *Odyssey*, recognizing that “Odysseus too was a chameleon,” and argues that the “suspicion of fluid and elusive identity in the epic is the most important legacy from *The Odyssey* to appear in *Molloy*” (Phillips 23). Offering that “the man with the oar on his shoulder becomes the man with a crutch,” Phillips points out that Odysseus compares himself to the lame Hephaistus, and that Molloy bears a touch of the trickster’s ingenuity as he is remarkably able to manage his crutches and bike at the same time (Phillips 23). In his analysis Phillips identifies structural and thematic similarities between the texts noting that both “fall into two parts” (Phillips 19) and that “every one of Odysseus’s main adventures has its echo in Molloy’s wanderings” (Phillips 20). Further, he asserts that *Molloy* “deflates the epic style… reducing heroic pretentions to absurdity” while still presenting an extended parallel to the Homeric tale that “deepens many of the implications already present in Odysseus’s shifting identities” (Phillips 19).

There is a “a Circe lurking in Lousse or a Cyclops in the policeman,” Phillips extends this comparison by identifying that “the mystery over Molloy’s name in the police interrogation parodies Odysseus’s use of the ‘noman’ riddle” (Phillips 19, 21-22). The surname “Molloy” being common from the Irish midlands to the Atlantic coast (Johnston); his region is vast indeed, as Moran even calls it “Molloy country” (131). This may help to explain why Molloy is summarily dismissed by the sergeant. Like Odysseus, who “loves his ‘lying yarns’ and gives out false stories of identity,” Molloy may just as
well be a pseudonym given at the policed station to buy his freedom (Phillips 23).

Perhaps the police realize that they are merely being japed with, which could explain why they let him go without charging him: merely to save themselves any further trouble.

From their vantage point Molloy may just seem to be the straight man who doesn’t even realize that he’s making a joke, let alone that he is the joke.

Later when describing Lousse’s attempts to convince him to stay with her it is surmised that she poisons his beer “with something intended to mollify me, to mollify Molloy” (47). Pondering Lousse’s proposition the text acknowledges that “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” (48). The reference to the “two fools” may simply be a nod to the uncertainty that is ubiquitous to human experience and the process of deliberation that all of us undertake at one point or another when presented with a decision as weighty as the one levied at him: to give up his quest to reach his mother’s house, as impossible as it seems, but so integral to his being. Who is Molloy if he isn’t trying to get to his mother’s house? What would he become to if he stopped, if he stayed, if he accepted this proposition to come in from the elements and sleep in a bed instead of a ditch?

The “others” mentioned in this passage are easily dismissed, if the reference is even noticed at all since this is, for all intents and purposes, a parenthetical to the rest of the sentence. Similar to the “number of replies” he receives when he wakes up and suddenly notices his beard is missing. A simple figure of speech, no doubt, signifying the number of possible answers that he is able to come up with: “I don’t know which of them was right. Perhaps they were all wrong” (38). These instances may seem purely trivial in
their immediate context, but when viewed from a broader perspective in relation to other parts of the trilogy these trivial points take on a new meaning and come to bear a greater significance. They become like pieces to a puzzle or clues to a riddle that seem unimportant on their own but take on greater meaning in a broader context.

It is impossible to appreciate every nuance of any text, if only because we don’t know what to look for yet. The end of the trilogy is still hundreds of pages away, and yet the fact “that movements of an extreme complexity were taking place seemed certain and yet what a simple thing it seemed, that vast yellow light sailing slowly behind my bars” (39). And yet we are so close. Closer than we think. Extremely complex movements are indeed taking place.

§ This time, then once more…

Perhaps we had begun all wrong, perhaps we should return to the beginning. In his book The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: A Study (1979) Richard Admussen suggests that the first paragraph of Molloy was written late in the novel’s composition. Boulter notes how there is a deixis encoded in the use of the pronouns which he highlights as a crucial feature in the text:

I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now. I don’t know how I got there. (Boulter’s emphasis 2001, 64-65)

Boulter sees this as an indication of a connection between Molloy and Moran, but as we have considered in the section on plot permutations that any narration can be joined to another given sufficient indication by the text, and the trilogy is replete with lexies that function as indicators. The reference to an ambulance indicates a relation with Malone,
but we have already considered these sutures to a degree. But Boulter does not register

the *moi* as different than the *je*, which would appear as such:

"I am in my mother’s room. It’s *me* who live *there* now. I don’t know how I
got *there*. (my emphasis)"

If we combine the shift in the pronoun with the shift in the location there are two
different pronouns *there: me there* and *I there*, to which there is a third *I* (which is the
first) separated from the other *I*. The first *I* evokes a presence, the second if not an
absence than a *there-ness*. There are at least three here.

Despite preforming this analysis in the French text Boulter does not recognize the
shift in the personal pronoun in the second sentence, but he does recognize a division in
distance (*here/there*) as well as time suggesting a splitting or simultaneity in the second
paragraph in the form of an *I/you* opposition (2001 65-66). But that’s still only two.
Where is the third?

If we can think of the *je/moi/je* alternation in the first three sentences as
something of a map, the *moi* breaking up the division between the first *je* and the second.
On top of the subject/object variance in the personal pronouns. It is almost as if the text is
saying “here I am, but over there you’ll find me,” which in a sense undermines the ‘here-
ness’ of the here and even the possibility that the narrator is even in his mother’s room to
begin with. If the English text does not give us the same chance to grasp this schism
already there in the first three sentences we are given an excellent example of it in this
revelation near the end of the second paragraph.

And when I say I said, etc., all I mean is that I knew confusedly things
were so, without knowing exactly what it was all about. And every time I
say, I said this, or I said that, or speak of a voice saying, far away inside
me, Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find
myself compelled to attribute to others intelligible words, or hear my own
voice uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. For what really happened was quite different. … In reality I said nothing at all, but I heard a murmur, something gone wrong with the silence, and I pricked up my ears, like an animal I imagine, which gives a start and pretends to be dead. And then sometimes there arose within me, confusedly, a kind of consciousness, which I express by saying, I said, etc. … (88)

Here it tells us that it says nothing at all, or speaks of a voice hidden away inside of himself speaking to him, or even speaking for him with his own voice. But there is also a murmur there. It’s there throughout. It’s everywhere in ever novel.

Murmurs

As the second paragraph of Molloy quickly begins to describe the movement of A and C the narrator’s attention lingers on C while A walks back to town. As the narrator watches C take his leave “on by-ways he seemed hardly to know,” the text describes how “he went with uncertain step and often stopped to look about him.” As this passage continues the focus of the narration shifts from objective observation to speculation, as the narrator declares “but now he knows these hills, that is to say he knows them better, and if ever again he sees them from afar it will be I think with other eyes, and not only that but the within, all that inner space one never sees,” until the narrator begins to imagine what C is thinking: “What shall I do? What shall I do? Now low, a murmur, now precise as the headwaiter’s And to follow?” (9-10).

Although it is not immediately apparent if the murmuring is something the narrator experiences himself or some imagined externality this point is clarified a few pages on where it reads “But instead of observing I had the weakness to return in spirit to
the other, the man with the stick. Then the murmurs began again” (13); and again towards
the end of this episode: “And so at last I came out of that distant night, divided between
the murmurs of my little world, its dutiful confusions, and those so different (so
different?) of all that between two suns abides and passes away” (15). The phrase
“murmurs of my little world” suggests that the murmur is indeed something the narrator
experiences himself, but it isn’t until the next mention that this point becomes clear.

This next appearance comes when Molloy is looking out at the Moon at Lousse’s
house, and at this point this murmur becomes alluded to as a “voice” a “far whisper” that
speaks and is attributed words:

But it is not a sound like the other sounds, that you listen to, when you
choose, and can sometimes silence, by going away or stopping your ears,
no, but it is a sound which begins to rustle in your head, without you
knowing how, or why. It’s with your head you hear it, not your ears, you
can’t stop it, but it stops itself, when it chooses. (40).

So then not only is the murmur an internal voice, but it is also an irrepressible and
perhaps constant presence. The text quickly turns away from the topic in order “to be
done with the business of the Moon which was left unfinished” (40-41). This passage
raises some serious questions as to what, exactly, we might call this murmur? A
hallucination? Some unconscious psychic function? Yes, probably that seems
unremarkable but wait there is a murmur and a voice where

§

When Worm is first introduced in Unnamable the text states that “he has not yet
been able to speak his mind, only murmur,” and at this point it is finally recognized that
Worm has been present throughout as the sentence finishes, “I have not ceased to hear his
murmur all the while the others discoursed” (337). While it is not exactly clear whether this duration extends all the way back to the start of *Molloy* or merely back to the beginning of *Unnamable*, there are mentions of murmurs from very early on in the former.

It would be entirely absurd to suggest that one would need to parse out separate voices from the beginning of any novel. And yet the entire trilogy is permeated by a voice, a murmur, a something. It’s there throughout, it’s on the last page of *Unnamable*, it’s on the first page of *Molloy*. You don’t even know it’s there unless you know to look for it. Acknowledging that “more than once I almost took myself for the other;” [ostensibly in reference to Mahood] the narrative voice wonders “What if we were one and the same after all” (315-16)? Previous to this query, in discussing “the other who passes for me” (308) it is noted that

It is his voice which has often, always mingled with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely. Until he left me for good, or refused to leave me any more. I don’t know. Yes, I don’t know if he’s here now or far away, … But his voice continued to testify for me, *as though woven into mine* (309 *my italics*).

The “other” voice being referred to in close context to this quote is Mahood, and not Worm. But again, later we are told that “if I am Mahood, I am Worm too, plop. Or if I am not yet Worm, I shall be when I cease to be Mahood” (338). There is no question that there are a series of characters in the novels, both literally from the first half of *Molloy* through *Malone Dies* and beyond (234). “Malone” speaks of an “other” and refers to himself as an “old foetus” waiting to drop – waiting to plop – out of his rotted dead mother evoking decay in the “putrid mucus, and swelling, swelling” and this comes in the middle of a four-page paragraph that has a wealth of intertextual signifiers, especially
evocative of Worm including mention of “well-meaning squirms that get me nowhere” (225). The Unnamable tells us:

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…(338)

Worm moves but does not go anywhere, as if waiting to be born, “waiting to drop” but this will never happen, “being less than a beast, before he is restored, more or less, to that state in which he was before the beginning of his prehistory” (358).

But then, is Malone even really the narrator of *Malone Dies*? “Malone” tells us that “I shall never get born and never get dead” (225). The narrative function tells us “I slip into him, I suppose, in the hope of learning something. But it is a stratum, strata, without debris or vestiges” (226). Malone’s own story becomes entangled with Sapo’s, since he writes about himself “with the same pencil and in the same notebook” whoever he is (207). While Malone’s own accounts are initially set apart from the stories Sapo and Macmann eventually they begin to appear in the same paragraph so the text switches between talking about Macmann and Malone. But is this Malone? The narrative function only seems to “inhabit” the identity for eleven pages, after begrudgingly accepting the moniker it casts it off “scrupulous to the last, finical to a fault, that’s Malone, all over” (233). Which seems to be a comment inserted into the text the same way that in *Molloy* the text reads: “chameleon in spite of himself, there you have Molloy, viewed from a certain angle” (30).

This could simply be Malone’s commentary as Malone might be the author of Molloy’s narrative. The same way that he, or whoever is writing the story of Sapo comments at the tedium of the tale in the text of the notebook that they include an
inventory of their own things, thoughts, etc. Unless we have an embedding within an embedding or unless Malone was only ever a construct of identity for the span of only around a dozen pages, far less than Molloy. Is Malone just what Molloy is called at Lousse’s, if that is even her name at all? Or are both of these irruptions of yet another voice who in the *Unnamable* says as much as ‘Malone’ or what ever narrative function makes the comment about slipping into the strata of another when it tells us “I’ll put myself in him, I’ll say he’s I” (400)

? Eventually the narration begins to slip as it does in *Molloy*, referencing Malone in the third person, suggesting that there is yet another authorial narrator that enframes this authorial narrative situation. By the point that this occurs we have already come to expect this regression *en abyme*, in anticipation of the true authorial frame’s revelation in the next novel. The Unnamable voice present itself as the narrator of the previous novels declaring “all these stories about travellers, these stories about paralytics, are all mine” (412). Although it uses pronouns it resists this signification stating that “there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it’s a kind of pronoun too” (405). Refusing to take on a persona, the voice cycles through a series of pronounal permutations – he, that, I, etc. Indicating that identity is merely a linguistic artifice regardless of the signifier the voice declares

there must be someone, the voice must belong to someone, I’ve no objection, what it wants I want, I am it, I’ve said so, it says so, from time to time it says so, then it says not, I’ve no objection, I want it to go silent, it wants to go silent, it can’t, it does for a second, the it starts again… (408)
Nicholas Royle insists that “there is never only one voice, one point of view or one narrative perspective, at any one time, in a literary work” (Royle 20).

Diachronically we might want to consider the hypothesis that Worm is already present at the beginning of *Molloy*. Of course, to make such a suggestion would be to accept the notion that *Molloy* is properly the “beginning” of the trilogy, which it may not be as we are quickly told by the narrator that it is “nearly the end” (8). But when we consider the order of the novels as arbitrary, and the possibility of multiple narrative paths it is obvious that the end of *Unnamable* loops back into the beginning of *Molloy*. But Worm is indeed present from the beginning of *Molloy* then there must be other traces, other clues besides just an allusive wordplay. There is a first reading for every text, and then there is a second, and then there are all that come after. Not expecting to ask at the beginning, which we’ll soon learn is also “nearly the end” (8) and since we are told this almost immediately we might realize that we might have to go back to the beginning at some point. Perhaps like a promise: *you’ll find out how I ended up in this place, but you won’t believe it!*

If there are two voices blended in with each other at the beginning of this text it would be easy to overlook precisely because it is not something that we would expect from a novel, or almost any text for that matter. Let alone three… In this regard *Molloy* breaks with conventions of syntax in written texts that run back for millennia, and which exist across a broad diversity of written cultures. In any given narrative we expect a degree of consistency from the narrator, and we may even judge the narrative itself solely on the ability of the narrator to narrate clearly. Often we are given reason to posit the narrator itself as a character within the narrative, and when that narrator changes or is
replaced with another voice we expect some qualitative indication or cue that there has been a change; that someone new is speaking. This is ostensibly the case when we come to the second part of *Molloy*, where the style takes on a radically ‘normal’ tone and style in contrast to the first section. We naturally assume that the change in style denotes a change in narrator.

As we read through Moran’s narrative we begin to get the feeling that Moran is becoming Molloy, for instance, when he muses to himself before embarking on his mission speaking of, “the Molloy I stalked within me” (115). And then at the end of part II where Moran is “clearing out” and the persona is vacated the text refers to an *it*. Initially the *I* carries us through the text as the agency that speaks, the *it* in the position of a second person, “It tried to understand their language better. Without having recourse to mine.” But then the *I* and *it* begin to cross over with one another as the narrator states, “I was getting to know *it* better now”, and the *I* comes to, “understand what it wanted.” When the narrator follows this sentence by saying, “It did not use the words that Moran had been taught.” and we are left only with the *I* that goes back into the house to write.

We have assumed that perhaps Moran became Molloy, or Malone, but we have never considered the fact that there is an *it* there lurking behind the *I*. But Worm? Can we even talk about Worm before we even know what to look for? Does a person ever exist before we even know who they are? The *I* speaks throughout the text, in Molloy it takes several pages to identify itself as “Molloy” and not until it arrives at the police station. Malone is also reluctant to name himself and finally does so as a refusal. His pronoun talks about himself abstractly before naming himself stating “I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself” (189). It will take longer for Malone to name himself than
Molloy and when he first does he immediately refers to himself as an object, a “that” in a parenthetical “(since that is what I’m called now)” (222). The Unnamable contemplates:

I may therefore perhaps legitimately suppose that the one-armed one-legged wayfarer of a moment ago and the wedge-headed trunk in which I am now marooned are simply two phases of the same carnal envelope, the sold being notoriously immune form deterioration and dismemberment. (330)

Todorov warns us “the pronoun 'I' belongs to everyone” the function of self-same identification becomes a seductive lure at the linguistic level, but even in absentia of the signification of unity, under the personal pronoun the unary narrator is merely a function -- “it is a mechanism internal to the text, a structural concomitant” and nothing more than that (84). It is a mask, it is a place holder, it is an act of deception.

§ Voilà Worm!

Je suis dans la chambre de ma mère. C'est moi qui y vis maintenant. Je ne sais pas comment j’y suis arrivé. (7)

It we return again to look at the first three sentences and the three pronouns. The first I here, the me there, the I there. The moi is easy to overlook, it hides better than the I – indeed Boulter did not notice. Represented by the relative pronoun que or who which ostensibly refers back to the personal pronoun, but this relationship is not necessarily guaranteed. If we are to consider that there are two voices present within the narrative, why not consider the possibility that they could inhabit the same sentence? Perhaps there are really four? At least there are three.

Vis is the conjugation for both the first and second person of vivre, and if we were to break out scalpels to dance upon the edge of the absurd, then from this perspective the translation would read It's me who there you live now. The same conjugation is also the
second person imperative, a command for ... you to live now! We might wonder who this second person is, you the me or the I would be speaking to in this case? Us, the reader? But then why vis? Why not habite or réside? Why viver? Why not habiter or résider, either of which would be a more appropriate verb choice than vivre since in this instance the subject of the sentence is expressing that it dwells in, inhabits, or resides in its mother’s room. Unless the “carnal envelope.”

In Unnamable the narrating subject pronoun comes to claim that it is being turned into Worm stating that “if they ever succeed in getting me to give a voice to Worm, in a moment of euphory, perhaps I’ll succeed in making it mine, in a moment of confusion” (Unnamable 348). And just such a moment arises in the third sentence of Molloy where we are told “I don’t know how I got here” which is just the first of many statements in the text made from a position of uncertainty. This raises the proposition that Worm is already present at the beginning of Molloy; and is this not already acknowledged in the second sentence by the presence of this vis?

If we look a few lines below from this point in Unnamable where the voice goes on: “Yes, now that I’ve forgotten who Worm is, where he is, what he’s like, I’ll begin to be he” (348). But does this mean that we can say that Worm is already present from the beginning of Molloy? If we read further on we may find, if not an affirmative response to this question then perhaps another detail that would point in this direction, as the text reads:

Yes, let us call that thing Worm, so as to exclaim, the sleight of hand accomplished, Oh look, life again, life everywhere and always, the life that’s on every tongue, the only possible!” (349 my italics).

Which appears in French:
Oui, appelons ça Worm, pour pouvoir nous écier, au terme du passe-passe, Mais c’est de la vie encore, la vie partout et toujours, celle dont tout le monde parle, la seule possible. (127 my italics)

The juxtaposition of “Worm” with “vie” in this context suggest a degree of interchangeability between the two terms. It is as if the text is suggesting that this passage could be read: ‘Oh look, Worm again, Worm everywhere and always... ’ which would be possible in French since vie is pronounced the same as vis: the /s/ consonant at the end of the latter word is latent in spoken French unless it forms a liaison with a vowel at the beginning of the net word, which it does not in the second sentence of Molloy. Worm has been there, woven into the text from the very beginning!

The sleight of hand, accomplished.

[fin]
Chapter 2

Metafiction

There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those, like some of the works of Borges, Barth, and Flann O'Brien, for example, in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafictions. (25)

The concept of "metafiction" is proposed by William H. Gass in his essay "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction" (1970) although it already existed. Gass identifies the origins of the genre in Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, and Samuel Beckett. That same year Robert Scholes publishes his own essay titled "Metafiction" (1970) where he presents his own understanding of the term in the works of Roy Coover and Daniel

Patricia Waugh provides is a perspective that Gass and Scholes can not give. Both of her predecessors locate the birth of metafiction in the U.S. in the 1960s, a period of time in which Waugh identifies an obsession for terms such as 'metapolitics', 'metarhetoric' and 'metatheater' which "are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers" (3). In doing so she draws attention to the 1961 English translation of Louis Hjelmslev's *Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse* (1943 tr. *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* 1953), which is reissued in 1961 as a probable source for all things 'meta' in the ensuing decade.

The identification and formation of the genre of metafiction is as much a collaborative effort between Gass and Scholes built upon a shared interest in experimental fiction, as well as a shared dissatisfaction in the current state of literature and criticism. To be sure, Scholes finds the critical landscape in the United States lacking at that point, leading him to suggest that this offers a space for the authors of metafiction to fill the critical gap. He also expresses disdain for the novelistic form, and the aesthetics of representation that define it.

In the same era a critical transformation takes place in France. *Communications 8, Recherches sémiologiques : l'analyse structurale du récit* is published in 1966, which marks the beginning of a new approach in the study of narrative based not just on structural linguistics of Saussure, but also the semiotic approach developed by Hjelmslev.

Todorov introduces the term “narratology” in his *Grammaire du Décaméron* (1969), Genette’s *Discours du récit* (1972) becomes an incredibly influential text to the new field of study, the influence of Hjelmslev can be seen in the relational approach taken up by both individuals. Greimas is already a semiotician in his own right. Eco, Metz, and Barthes especially take up a more decidedly semiotic approach to their theoretical methods as they move beyond mere structuralism. As Barthes moves out of his earlier mode of structuralist analysis the influence of Hjelmslev becomes more pronounced, *S/Z* (1970) is predicated almost entirely on the connotative semiotics introduced in the *Prolegomena*.

The 1960s become as a significant decade for experimental literature especially by Scholes, but also by critics such as Ihab Hassan whose own criticism introduces and advances the critical theory of literary postmodernism. Beckett begins to publish his *Fizzles* and continues to release English translations of his earlier experiments in French. Alain Robbe-Grillet publishes his essay "Pour un nouveau roman" in 1963 along with a collection of other essays spanning back to 1956 (*Pour un nouveau roman* tr. *For a New Novel* in 1965) which help to define the specifically French genre of experimental fiction.

The *Oulipo* (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle, or “Workshop of potential literature”) was founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais.as a subcommittee of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique, its existence as a group went largely unnoticed for almost a decade or more, although some of its members gained recognition.
on their own. Comprised of a loose group of mostly authors and mathematicians, its members tended to produce a highly permutative style of literature.

This chapter is something of a critical excavation, beginning with the concept of metafiction and the field of literature first defined by Gass and Scholes, it broadens just as the category of metafiction escapes the rather narrow definition that Scholes applies to the term. While there is the tendency to describe a range of texts as ‘metafictions’ it is inapt to refer to every piece of experimental literature as such.

Metafiction

In "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction" (1970) Gass describes a genre of literature that employs “philosophical ideas in the construction of fictional works – in a very self-conscious and critical way” (24). Parsing metafictions from "those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing," Gass considers metafictions texts "in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed," including "many of the so-called antinovels" recent to that era (24-25). Gesturing towards “metatheorems in mathematics and logic,” the “linguistic oversoul” of ethics, “and the emergence “lingos” contrived “to converse about lingos” he proposes the term “metafiction” (24). A philosopher himself, having studied under Wittgenstein (who he mentions in the essay) while attaining his Ph.D. in philosophy at Cornell, he praises the ontological quality of metafiction.

At the start of his essay Gass declares “the esthetic aim of any fiction is the creation of a verbal world… alive through every order of its Being” (7). In discussion of Beckett’s “Ping” he praises its metaphysical quality, writing that “there is no
subordination” between adjective and noun as the words form a “community of equals” on the same plane of existence, as if Beckett’s true medium of composition were the Platonic forms themselves (14). He proposes that every sentence of fiction “takes metaphorical dictation,” mentioning not only Beckett, but also the works of Jane Austen, and Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentlemen* (1759) for the “philosophical quality” of their writing (14). The spaces that Austen’s fiction create are simply “metaphysical,” each sentence an act of creation in the way that Sterne writes “A cow broke in tomorrow morning to my Uncle Toby’s fortifications” (qtd. in Gass 14).

Part invocation and part lamentation, Gass ends his essay claiming that the contemporary novelist has “been driven out of healthy contact with his audience, and the “supreme values of fiction . . . sentimentalized” by an “utterly bourgeois” form of literature. Gass bemoans that this realm of fiction makes no search “for first principles, none for rules” so that “all capacity for thought” is abandoned for “passive and mechanical amusement” (26). At the same time he implicates the critic, or more precisely the philosopher as critic, noting that “philosophical analysis of fiction has scarcely taken its first steps,” since “philosophers continue to interpret novels as if they were philosophies themselves” by looking at content instead of form (25). Occupying the space in between the two (as an author himself), he gestures towards the artist’s “tremendous technical skill, and except in rare and highly favored persons, great labor” to produce their work (8). Finally placing the onus on the critic, Gass concludes that only the proper critical response will reconnect the author’s “healthy contact with his audience” and in closing declares that the novel “has come, in darkness, far. But it will not stir farther until the appreciation of it has become *properly* philosophical” (26).
To be sure, Gass’ essay has the tone and feel of a manifesto, but the sentiment expressed in his essay certainly found resonance with a range of authors and critics alike who had grown tired with the dominant aesthetics of realism, representation, and the form of the novel itself. Robert Scholes includes it in his edited collection *The Philosopher-Critic* (1970) and in his own writing expresses a similar tone of disappointment with the fields of literature and criticism.

Gass literally calls for a new school of criticism, which Scholes identifies as the Geneva critics, or “critics of consciousness,” who look for “the essential values that inhere in the experience of fiction,” in contrast to structuralist critics whose concern is “the ideas that inform fictional structure and the laws that preside over the order of fiction” (1970, 106). In an echo of Gass’ indictment of the field of literary criticism, Scholes notes the “chaos and confusion” in the Anglophone critical scene, noting that “the most vigorous and important work” at in the 1960s takes place in the structuralist and philosophical approaches undertaken by French critics (1970, 106). Scholes reasons that the state of confusion in America provides the space for “a vigorous new fiction” to develop and thrive in the absence of organized critical oversight (1970, 106). Finding the predominantly formal and behavioral approaches of his American counterparts shameful, this critical deficit becomes a windfall for the author of metafiction.

**Fabulation**

is thought to have introduced the printing press to England, in the 15th century (1967, 6).

In his book *The Fabulators* (1967) Scholes describes the fabulative movement as one that marks a return to the form of the fable and employs a range of formal techniques including the use of multiple narrators, the presence of frame tales and embedded narratives, or any reference to narrator as "the shaper, the fabulator behind the fable" (1967, 10).

The "Eighth Fable of Alfonce" (1484) consists of a frame tale with an embedded narrative: a story about a rich man who goes to market to buy some sheep, told to a king by his fabulator, enclosed in another frame tale about a master and his disciple. The inner and outer most tales are not brought to resolution, but the ending of the outer tale is superfluous since its true function is rather to emphasize the authority of the fabulator. The “shaggy sheep” story is unending by its nature and as such “allowed to continue in our imaginations”; in the middle frame the king is “well appeased and pacified” by his fabulator at the point where the innermost tale is cut off; as for the outer frame we are left to assume that the disciple is on the verge of satisfaction, just like the king (1967, 8). “As master is to disciple, so is fabulator to king” and this inverted power dynamic between the king and his fabulator is reinforced by the position that both the master and the fabulator occupy as storyteller, which stresses the importance of the latter in his ability to “rejoice and refresh” the king when he is “sorrowful” and “heavy” (1967, 10). Overall satisfaction derives from both formal appreciation of the structure of the fable as well as in the ability of the fabulator to pacify the listener, and as such Scholes stresses the qualities of “art and joy” which “of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest
premium on.” The quality of the structure in “it’s very shapeliness” also refers back to the “fabulator behind the fable” (1967 10).¹

In his modern deployment of the term Scholes uses the term “fabulator” to describe a movement of authors, predominantly American, whose works emphasize or convey qualities of “art and joy” and to a lesser degree display didactic or allegorical qualities of traditional fables “in peculiarly modern ways” (1967, 10-11). This return to the form of the fable also marks the rejection of an aesthetic “that had seen its best days and was being perpetuated in a trivial and often mechanical way” including the realistic novel but also the cinema (1979 1). Fabulations eschew the “pseudo-objectivity” of such forms and move towards “a more verbal kind of fiction” of romance, allegory, irony, or the form of the fable: forms that offer a the “distinctively human perspective” of language (1967 12).

**Critical Fiction**

In *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970) Gass gives a set of examples of what he means by metafiction, as he qualifies that these are not merely “pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing,” the emergence of the genre marks a "radical" development in literature wherein "the novelist now better understands his medium." The author of metafiction ceases "to pretend that his business is to render the world;” which frees them “to make one,” from the medium of language (24-25). In subsequent chapters he gives focus to works by: Donald Barthelme, Roy Coover, Borges, and Vladimir Nabokov in order to provide a field and offers elaboration of specific texts he considers exemplary to the genre.
Selecting Donald Barthelme’s collection of short stories *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts* (1968), Gass points out the “heterogeneous experience of language” engendered by the text as multiple sources of information and dialog are homogenized as in the short story “The Indian Uprising” where every character, “everyone speaks for the author” (99-100). The text provides a smattering of multimedia as “radios, televisions, movies, newspapers, books, magazines,” and “social talk” are combined to “supply us with our experience” (100). In this pastiche of information everything is stripped of its value, as nothing in Barthelme’s fiction is more important than anything else: everything is dreck, trash, stuffing. Barthelme “constructs a single plane of truth, or relevance, of style, of value – a flatland junkyard – since anything dropped in the dreck is dreck” (101). At a formal level all information is situated on the same plane, on a flattened ontology, just as Beckett’s prose presents all words as having equal value.

Gass’ second example is Robert Coover’s collection *Pricksongs & Descants* (1969) which employs a “paragraph as playing card style” of fiction (106). Coover’s writing evokes the feeling “that a single fable may have various versions” as stories like “The Elevator” or “The Babysitter” unfold like games of solitaire (104). Rendering the difference between fact and fantasy null, in these stories the reader can modulate elements of temporality, identity, and relative perspective to produce a different narrative with each new reading. Every decision made by one of the characters marks a point of divergence where the narrative forks off, splitting itself into multiple vectors, and each choice presented within the diegetic reality of the text is doubled as it also becomes a choice laid before the reader. By invoking this sense of multiplicity Gass argues that all
forks are taken and that these “simultaneous journeys” yield “simultaneous stories, yet in different genres” (105).

The lone novel in Gass’ archive is Vladimir Nabokov’s second, Король, дама, валет (1928) and his twelfth published in English under the title King, Queen, Knave (1968). Even in discussing authors who do write novels, like Beckett, Gass shies away from dealing with their longer texts and instead opts to limit his discussion to shorter stories, and there are at least two likely reasons for this. The first is that short stories offer a degree of latitude for experimentation and, indeed, as Beckett takes leave of the English language to compose his trilogy of novels in French he begins his exploration of writing in a second language in the Nouvelles and Mercier et Camier (1970) which are all composed circa 1946. A second is that a proper analysis of longer experimental works is somewhat daunting, as we will see once we turn to an analysis of Beckett’s trilogy of novels: it can be difficult to decide where to begin, what to focus on, etc. Take for perspective James Joyce’s infamous proclamation that Ulysses (1922) contains "put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant" (qtd. in Ellman 521). Consider how much more conventional Ulysses appears by comparison to Beckett’s trilogy and it is easy to understand why it is easier to focus on shorter texts, especially in the process of trying to introduce and define a new conceptual genre and approach to fiction.

In his psalm to Nabokov Gass declares that the Russian’s prose “is always lyrical and moving,” gushing in a footnote how this enacts a “release of language” – from the trappings of realism and the “historical forms” of fiction that Gass deems “imprisoning” to the author and language itself (115). If nothing else, Gass is insistent and even jubilant
at the premise of turning away from reality, or else literary realism in order to indulge in the pleasures of artifice. Although his chapters on Barthelme and Coover deal more with technical and formal characteristics of their writing, his discussion of Nabokov turns towards an examination of more figural and metaphorical properties of literature.

*King, Queen, Knave* plays out like a game of chess, except that the game is not between the novel’s characters: these are merely pieces on the board. Instead, the match is between the reader and Nabokov himself, whose novels “are attacks upon their readers, though not like Genêt’s and much modern theater” nor like Baudelaire’s for that matter – again, this is one of those points where Gass evades explaining just how Nabokov differs from a short list of vague and glancing references to other texts and authors (116). The best that can be deciphered from this metaphor is the way in which Nabokov’s texts manipulate the reader into taking up certain observational positions the way one might force an opponent to make a move, or else deny their progression to certain squares on the board during a game of chess.

**Fabulation and Metafiction**

In his essay “Metafiction” (1970)\(^2\) Scholes qualifies that in addition to the rejection of realism and the use of formal technique, metafictions also assimilate critical perspectives into the fictional process to “emphasize structural, formal, behavioral, or philosophical qualities” of literature itself (1970 106). Building upon Gass’ definition, Scholes identifies a field of authors roughly comprised of the same set proposed by the former. In addition to Coover’s *Pricksongs*: Barthelme’s *City Life* (1970) is substituted for *Unspeakable Practices*; John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), which is
mentioned by Gass in a footnote to his chapter on Coover (see Gass 107) is substituted for either Nabokov or Borges (who still receive honorable mention along with Beckett); and, paying homage to Gass, *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* (1968) rounds out this exemplary range of metafiction. Scholes selects these specifically American authors by virtue of the exemplary display of formal (Barth), structural (Coover), behavioral (Barthelme), and philosophical (Gass) perspectives evinced in their work. Accordingly, Coover and Barth are “more immediately interested in the order of fiction itself,” and their texts respectively experiment with form and structure (1970 107). Gass and Barthelme are more “concerned with the conditions of being” such that their fictions take up critical aspects of what Scholes identifies as behavioral and philosophical criticism respectively (1970 110).

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“Fig. 1.1” (1970 101)  “Fig. 1.2” (1970 105)

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<th>LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE (formal)</th>
<th>CITY LIFE (behavioral)</th>
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<td>PRICKSONGS AND DESCANTS (structural)</td>
<td>IN THE HEART OF THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY (philosophical)</td>
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“Fig. 1.3” (1970 107)

*Figure 2.1 Figures From Scholes*
Like Gass, Scholes analysis focuses primarily on collections of short stories since metafictions attempt “among other things, to assault or transcend the laws of fiction – an undertaking which can only be achieved from within [the] fictional form” but which is also difficult to sustain. Although Scholes mentions Thomas Pynchon’s tome *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) as an example of metafiction in the introduction to *Fabulation and Metafiction*, its formal presentation as a text woven from multiple voices and perspectives is similar to the composite nature that Gass already identifies in Barthelme’s short stories. Further, experiments often fail, and elaborating that when metafictions are extended they “must either lapse into a more fundamental mode of fiction or risk losing all fictional interest in order to maintain its intellectual perspectives” (1970 107; see also 1979 p. 114).

While he expands the definition of metafiction beyond the philosophical, at the same time he narrows its definition, refining and reconfiguring the field that Gass proposes. Scholes reasons that the relative strength of the Geneva critics and other continental schools “seems to have stifled” the proliferation of experimentation in France (1970 106). Specifically eschewing the *Nouveau Roman* – although his disdain for the genre seems largely misplaced, arguably the *New Novel* is as much an assault on the predominant aesthetic of representation albeit from an opposite angle – Scholes also seems unaware of experimental groups such as the *Oulipo* who became active around the same time.

Patricia Waugh qualifies the distinction between fabulation and metafiction, while she identifies both as self-conscious literary forms she inverts their relationship making the former but one type in a "wide range" of metafictional styles and experimental texts
Placing metafiction on an even plane with the fabulative, she describes the difference between the two by pointing out how “metafiction explores the concept of fictionality through an opposition between the construction and the breaking of illusion, while fabulation reveals instead what Christine Brooke-Rose (1980) has referred to as a reduced tension between technique and counter-technique: a ‘stylization’ which enables other voices to be assimilated, rather than presenting a conflict of voices” (Waugh 16). Again, Bakhtin’s dialogic principle comes into play, since the fabulative text reduces the conflict of voices under the aegis of the fabulator-as-narrator.

**Recursive Redefinitions**

Patricia Waugh refines the term even further in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), and her entry into the discussion comes from a position of remove that allows for a broader recognition of authors and approaches not recognized by Gass or Scholes. Waugh constructs a thorough definition, going well beyond Gass’ rudimentary attempt, and her rigor even surpasses Scholes’ offering which feels vague and incomplete by comparison. She defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). At the same time Waugh expands the field beyond the cordons of Scholes’ definition; instead of a purely American phenomenon, she opens the field back onto an international context mentioning works such as Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler* (1979), and Julio Cortázar’s *The problem with* Waugh’s definition is that she goes from genre to generic, and the more precisely that Waugh tries to define metafiction, the more the term
disintegrates. Although she provides greater sense of context for the era in which metafiction becomes a literary form, at the same time she introduces a greater sense of ambiguity to the term. Drawing attention to Laurence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) for its self-referential quality, she suggests that this quality is a feature to the form itself, acknowledging that "metafiction is a tendency or function inherent to all novels" an observation that seriously threatens the category as such (5). In an effort to keep true to the idea that metafiction is somehow a 20th century phenomenon, Waugh qualifies that metafictions “explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" in a "formal self-exploration, drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in the terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic, or literary theory" (Waugh 2-3). Of course, this does little to shore up the definition, as the argument can be made that early novels like *Tristram Shandy* and *Don Quixote* (1615) do just that. In a sense Waugh’s invocation of *Tristram Shandy* is merely an act of due diligence, as both Gass and Scholes mention Sterne’s novel. But it also highlights the paradox of metafiction, and perhaps the novel as a form of literature notorious for its formlessness. Its ironic that Scholes tries to limit the definition of metafiction to the 20th century when he clearly finds a ready example in the fable of Alfonce, or that Gass invokes Sterne and Austin in the same breath as Beckett.

The salient line that runs from Gass, through Scholes to Waugh is the idea that the metafictional text takes a critical interest in form, and an overt reference to that interest within the text itself. She continues that in "providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary text"
(Waugh 2). In this sense metafiction becomes metacommendatory, a form of play and "construction of an alternative reality" through the manipulation of the "relation between a set of signs (whether linguistic or non-linguistic) as 'message' and the context or frame of that message" (Waugh 35). The function of the frame becomes crucial to metafictions, specifically as frames are established only to be broken, thus calling into question the distinction between what is real and what is fiction. Metafictions employ strategies that construct or establish frames which remain imperceptible until they are transgressed, exposing the frame as such. In this way the "alternation of frame, and frame-break" provide the "essential deconstructive method" for metafiction (Waugh 31) drawing attention to "the fact that life, as well as novels, [are] constructed through frames" that provide order and meaning to their respective register (Waugh 31, 29). But Metafictions are not explicitly frame tales or embedded narratives, for Scholes these qualities are present in texts that are not considered explicitly metafictional, as Waugh indicates the frame must be broken, or at least revealed as such, drawing attention to the artificiality of the artifice itself – like a linguistic tromp l’oeil.

Self-reference remains paramount for metafiction, since it can be exploited to introduce a critical discourse into the text, and alongside the narrative, so that "the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction" (Waugh 6). What the metafictional text provides is not only a statement about the creation of that specific text, but also about the way in which ideological and epistemological knowledge are themselves fictional constructs: just so-stories or narratives that we tell ourselves to understand the world and our own place in it.
Commenting on the distinction between fiction and reality already present in Gass and Scholes, Waugh qualifies it through Mikhail Bakhtin's idea that the novel, or work of fiction, already possesses a "dialogic" potential. She argues that this potential becomes suppressed in literary realism, a "classical fictional mode" operating under the aegis of the "dominant 'voice' of the omniscient, godlike author" thus reducing the conflict of voices and languages that the dialogical text brings to the fore (Waugh 6). For Waugh, the dominant voice that metafiction is set up against is a 19th century form of realism "derived from a firm belief in a commonly experienced, objectively existing world of history" (Waugh 6). Although literary realism becomes the category, or genre, that the metafictional text responds to, the critical approach that metafiction undertakes is clearly applicable to the dominant ideologies that operate in the realms of science, history, philosophy, and society writ large. Due to the breakdown of the "materialist, positivist and empiricist world-view on which realistic fiction is premised" metafictions bring the dialogic qualities of the novel to the fore, resisting the satisfactory sense of resolution that realism provides by stressing uncertainty, by constructing a fictional illusion and then exposing it as such (7). In other words, metafictions oppose the grand récits, or legitimating metanarratives that Lyotard discusses in *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport Sur Le Savoir* (1979).

Although Lyotard's name is absent from Waugh's bibliography, and *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) is not published in English until the same year as Waugh's book, the conceptual apparatus that he lays out is present in her definition of metafiction. Verily, she even acknowledges that "metafiction is a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as post-modernism" that
emerges as a form of the avant-garde in the 1960s and 70s (Waugh 21). But then the avant-garde emerged long before that, and Lyotard was certainly not the first to use the term ‘postmodern.’

Indeed both Waugh and Lyotard cite Ihab Hassan’s book *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1971), Hassan’s project runs parallel to Scholes’ and in his ‘paracritical bibliography’ of the field “POSTmodernISM” (1971), Hassan also claims Barth, Barthelme, Beckett, and Borges (along with Brecht, Broch, Burroughs, Butor) as examples of postmodern authors (12). Indeed, Hassan’s postmodernism and Scholes’ fabulative metafiction emerge as rival theories at approximately the same time. Perhaps the most significant difference between Scholes and Hassan is the broader field in which they position their critical approach. While Scholes narrows his project, attempting to locate fabulation and metafiction almost exclusively within an American tradition, Hassan locates postmodernism within the broader context of western literary history that emerges “within the tradition of the modern” avant-garde (*Orpheus* 4). Arguably a tradition that is more pronounced in France than in America, although it is ironic that one of the more significant influences on the movement in France is Edgar Allan Poe, who is translated by Baudelaire. The recursions are almost uncanny.

**Modal Fiction**

Edgar Allan Poe sits in a strange correlation to this entire discussion of metafiction, not only as the inventor of the detective story, as he employs a range of narrative techniques in his writing that are associated with the avant-garde styles of
literature utilized by authors that are considered to be postmodern, especially Borges. In his essay “The Detective Story” (1978) Borges pays homage to Poe as the inventor of the genre. Discussing how Poe modifies stories of true crime to write the Dupin trilogy he elaborates that “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” merely adapts newspaper reports of a murder in New York. Poe moves the crime to Paris, changes the girl’s name from Marie Rogers to Marie Rogêt, “then suggests how the crime may have been committed. And indeed, years later the murderer was found and confirmed what Poe had written” (Nonfictions 497).

Not only does Borges work exclusively in the form of the short story, he also takes up his method of modulation, and “keys” the Dupin stories to write his own detective trilogy. In his book The Mystery to a Solution (1994) John T. Irwin conducts an extensive investigation of Borges’ imitation and modulation of Poe’s detective fiction that borders on the mathematically sublime. Borges models his own detective fictions according to Poe’s Dupin trilogy, and Irwin notes how “La muerte y la brújula” (1942 tr. “Death and the Compass” 1954) not only presents a specific doubling of the structure of “The Purloined Letter” (1844) but also “keys” it with a position-shifting triad to modulate it accordingly (Irwin 426). Accordingly "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" (1941, tr. “The Garden of Forking Paths” 1948), is keyed to the central structure in “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1846), and “Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" (1949 tr. “Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth” 1951) is a modulation of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) (Irwin 434).

By “keying” the Dupin trilogy to write his own detective fiction Borges creates a modal narrative the same way that Poe keys the stories of real life crime to create the
detective genre. Just as Poe modulates newspaper reports of real life crimes to construct his detective fictions and invent an entirely new genre of literature, Borges modulates and permutates Poe’s detective fictions in order to make his own detective ficciones. More compelling than the way in which this elaborates how the shred of realism is always present in the work of fiction – if not also by the condition that words themselves are already referent to the symbolic reality that the work of verisimilitude always references and refers back to – is the way in which Borges modulates preexisting stories, ideas, or philosophical concepts in order to create his ficciones. Indeed, it is his contemplation of philosophical ideas that makes Borges so appealing to Gass.

**Fictional Criticism**

For Gass metafictions challenge the accepted version of reality by way of reference to a metaphysical realm where ideas exist on an equal plane with one another, or where multiple versions of reality coexist in parallel to each other. The realities they create serve as indictments of our own, just as their reference to, and use of language enact an indictment of form, meaning, and the prevailing order that sustains the status quo. Metafictions are an exploration of the form(s) of fiction and limits of language, indeed “form makes a body of a book, puts all its parts in a system of internal relations so severe, uncompromising, and complete that changes in them anywhere alter everything” (Gass 119). Form is paramount, Gass is clear that “there are no descriptions in fiction, there are only constructions” governed by a set of overriding principles (Gass 17).

The same, for that matter, is true of narration, dialogue, character, and the rest. Just as the painter’s designs help make his object, the lines of the novelist offer no alternatives, they are not likely interpretations of anything, but are the thing itself. (17-18)
The turn away from an aesthetic of realism is only one function of metafiction, at the same time they can create new realities, or else suggest them by way of an indictment of our own tenuous grasp on the imaginary or symbolic constructions of reality that become mistaken for the real — like the image in a mirror that one does not realize is a mirror image.

Mirrors are also a familiar trope in Borges’ fictions: deceptive by nature, they gesture towards the infinite, to parallel selves and uncanny realities that merge with, diverge from, and even threaten our own reality. Just in the way that the discovery of an undocumented country in an encyclopedia of dubious origin effects an epistemic shift in the narrator’s reality in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (1940) — the mirror of fiction can hold the same power for our own. Borges is the author Gass devotes the most attention to, and his short stories offer the premier example of texts that engage with philosophical concepts. Citing Wittgenstein, he argues that Borges takes up the battle “against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” and that his fictions perform “precisely a similar function, for there is scarcely a story which is not built upon a sophistry… so frantically embraced, so pedantically developed, so soberly defended, it becomes the principal truth in the world his parable creates” (Gass 128).

Indeed, stories like “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” explicitly take up philosophical concepts like Berkeley’s subjective idealism. Borges’ fictions are philosophical thought puzzles that play with the concepts they take up as subject matter to explore the ontological possibilities these ideas offer: as when the narrator in “Tlön…” discusses the possibility of composing a novel “in the first person, whose narrator would omit or
disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers – very few readers – to perceive an atrocious or banal reality (*Labyrinths* 3).

With each of his fictions Borges crates a new world, a new plane of existence, a new reality similar to our own, but built according to its own unique ontological principles. Gass is taken with the idea that fiction can be substituted for reality, the way it is in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” and how history can be altered accordingly, or else the way in which Borges’ fictions become “contiguous realities” to our own (Gass 131). Texts like “Tlön…” play with the distinction between fiction and reality, indeed as the discovery of a fake entry in an ersatz facsimile of the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* leads to the ‘discovery’ of an ancient country, its strange language, and its philosophical epistemology (predicated on the subjective idealism of Bishop Berkeley) – the product of a hoax concocted by a clandestine society which eventually comes to supplant the reality of the narrator. In the final paragraph of the story’s “Postscript” dated 1947 (seven years after the story’s initial publication) the narrator laments that “English and French and mere Spanish will disappear from the globe. The world will be Tlön” the fictitious region that becomes conjured out of thin air like the ‘ancient’ artifacts of the fictitious land (*Labyrinths* 18).

Narrated as a first-person account and even including Borges’ real live friend Bioy Casares this particular fiction even fools Gass who repeats in a footnote part of the premise described in the first paragraph of the text. Although, Gass closes this note with the aporetic assertion that “It should be perfectly clear, in any case, that Schopenhauer has read Borges and reflects him,” an obvious impossibility since Schopenhauer dies in 1860, nearly 40 years before Borges is even born (Gass fn. 6, 126). Affording him the
benefit of the doubt we can assume that this statement is merely a performative gesture, a
monstration that turns criticism into theory the way that authors like Borges espouse their
own critical literary theories through their fictional works. Indeed, that’s what Gass does
throughout the chapter. Of course, Schopenhauer was well aware of Borges’ only novel
*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*

The intersection between fiction and reality is always tenuous, always framed. Reality is a
construct of symbolic codes, what is accepted, what is tolerated. Narrative shapes reality
the same way that reality influences narrative. As Borges’ fictions lead us to question the
ideologies that our own reality is built upon, Gass writes that when reading them “we must
think of literature as a landscape, present all at once like space, and we must remember that
literary events, unlike ordinary ones … repeat themselves, although with variations, in
every mind the text fills” (125). Given this observation it is a little disappointing that Gass
fails to make any mention of “The Garden of Forking Paths,” especially given his focus on
Coover’s stories where “just like the figures in old fairy tales and fables, we are constantly
coming to forks in the road (always fateful),” which are all taken simultaneously (Gass 105).
Indeed, “The Garden of Forking Paths” becomes a prime example of when a work of fiction
ceases to function simply as a story and becomes a work of critical literary theory as
Stephen Albert explains to his visitor that:

> In the work of Ts'ui Pên, all possible outcomes occur; each one is the point of
departure for other forking. Sometimes, the paths of this labyrinth converge: for
example, you arrive at this house, but in one of the possible pasts you are my enemy,
in another, my friend. (26)

In this story Borges anticipates the “ideal text” that Roland Barthes formulates in *S/Z*
wherein
the networks are many and interact, without anyone of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one (5).

The garden of forking paths is a labyrinth, but not an actual physical construct as Ts'ui Pên’s descendent, Yu Tsun presumes. In Borges’ story Yu pays visit to Albert, and as they discuss the manuscript of Ts'ui Pên’s novel that the latter is in possession of the former curses his grandfather who he regards as an embarrassment to him and his family. As Yu approaches Albert’s home in the English countryside he contemplates how his grandfather, who was once governor of Yunnan province but who renounced his position to write a novel and construct a labyrinth “in which all men would become lost” (Labyrinths 22). After thirteen years spent working in isolation at the Pavilion of the Limpid Solitude Ts'ui Pên is mysteriously murdered: the labyrinth is never found and the novel, which is already considered to be a lesser form of literature in Chinese culture, is only saved from condemnation in the fire by his executor who insists on their publication. Yu decries the novel as “an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts” citing that “in the third chapter the hero does, in the fourth he is alive” and as he turns to castigate his grandfather over the matter of the missing labyrinth Albert cuts him off by saying “Here is Ts'ui Pên’s labyrinth,” gesturing towards the desk in the room. Yu does not understand at first that the novel is the labyrinth: an infinite book and “invisible labyrinth of time” (Labyrinths 24-25).

Albert goes on to contemplate “the ways in which a book can be infinite” conjuring a “cyclic volume” whose “last page was identical with the first, a book which had the possibility of continuing indefinitely” thus becoming a labyrinthine space that
could never be exhausted (25). It is in this way that Ts'ui Pên’s labyrinth becomes a fictional version of Barthes’ ideal text, anticipating the critics theoretical postulate by just over three decades, although we could say that the concept is centuries older. To be sure, as Albert continues his contemplation of the infinite text by considering “that night which is at the middle of the Thousand and One Nights when Scheherazade (through a magical oversight of the copyist) begins to relate word for word the story of the Thousand and One Nights, establishing the risk of coming once again to the night when she must repeat it, and thus on to infinity” (Labyrinths 25).

His anticipation of Barthes’ theory of the ideal text is but one example of the theoretical prescience contained in Borges’ works. “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (1939, tr. “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” 1962) anticipates Barthes’ essay “La mort de l’auteur” (1967, tr. “The Death of the Author” 1967), again by nearly three decades. Written in the style of a retrospective literary review, and after listing off nineteen imaginary works by the fictitious 20th century author Pierre Menard, the review settles in to a discussion of Menard’s “peerless” reproduction of “the ninth and thirty-eight chapters of the first part of Don Quixote and a fragment of chapter twenty-two” (Labyrinths 38-39). Menard’s attempt is not to write a contemporary Quixote, nor a mere copy or mechanical transcription, he “did not want to compose another Quixote – which is easy – but the Quixote itself … word for word and line for line” by employing a method of “total identification” with Cervantes himself. The “relatively simple” method of identification is casually laid out:

   Know Spanish well, recover the Catholic faith, fight against the Moors or the Turk, forget the history of Europe between the years of 1602 and 1918, be Miguel de Cervantes. (Labyrinths 40).
One of the more elegant aspects of Borges’ *ficciones* is the speed with which they dive right to the heart of a theoretical or philosophical concept and then eviscerate it in the space of only a few lines. His critical economy is breathless, as in just one sentence he demonstrates what it takes Wimsatt and Beardsley to lay out in twenty pages in the essay “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946). Arguably the field of academic criticism has yet to catch up with the presagacity of this koan that renders any and every appeal to historicism dead on arrival.

Imagine “the *Odyssey* as if it were posterior to the *Aeneid* and the book *Le jardin du Centaure* of Madame Henri Bachelier as if it were by Madame Henri Bachelier. This Technique fill the most placid works with adventure. To attribute *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce,” – of course this is a sardonic proposition but what if it were taken *seriously*? Imagine what could be possible under the application of a technique of “deliberate anachronism and erroneous attribution (44). Imagine the “Garden of Forking Paths” by Edgar Allan Poe, or “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” by Jorge Luis Borges. If the author is as arbitrary to the reading and analysis of a text then history is just as contingent. While it isn’t wrong to apply historical or authorial contingents to the analysis of a text it is by no means necessary. Imagine the possibilities that might open in the reading of a text when one removes the strictures of historicism and authorial intent from the process. In a way, the authors have always been one step ahead of the critics.

"There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about
writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those, like some of the works of Gass, Menard, and Flann O'Brien, for example, in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafictions." (25)

In his books *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems* (2008), and *Neocybernetics and Narrative* (2014) Bruce Clarke attempts to link narratology with second-order systems theory. Defining narrative as “a primary formal and thematic program running on the complex infrastructures of social and psychic systems” he suggests that media systems communicate the medium of narrative across systems boundaries thanks to structural couplings across systems (2008, 13). As he elaborates in his introduction to *Posthuman Metamorphosis* “posthuman metamorphs couple the media systems that enact them to the social systems communicating them to the psychic systems of the readers or viewers comprehending them (2008, 3). But there are several flaws in Clarke’s attempt to merge narratology and second-order cybernetics -- flaws that threaten his entire approach -- which in its current inception stands in theoretical violation of both fields.
Clarke's project is encumbered by a theoretical assemblage that stubbornly resists to work in the way he wants it to. The primary obstacle to the cohesion of his project arises from his application of concepts from Gérard Genette's *Discours du récit* (in *Figures III* 1972, tr. *Discourse on Narrative* 1980) which Clarke either fundamentally misunderstands or willfully misreads -- perhaps a little of each. To resolve this issue he turns to the theories of Mieke Bal and F.K. Stanzel, who he uses from either side to force the concepts of *narration* and *focalization* into relation with Luhmann's second-order concepts of *operation* and *observation*. This creates problems with both the narratological and the systems approaches that he wishes to employ. The third problem is perhaps more crucial than the first two, as he misapprehends the reader's observer relation to the text in his formal schema.

The confusion is not just Clarke's, to be sure Bal presents a qualified definition of narration and focalization that redefines the terms, reinscribing them with a slightly different meaning. Further efforts to draw parallels between terms and concepts that may or may not function in the same way according to one system or the other. Genette's concepts get squeezed between Bal's definitions of his terms and F.K. Stanzel's understanding of the figural narrative situation, read through a media theory dynamic found in Bolter and Grusin, to align Genette's theory with systems theoretical terminology. The result is a conceptual narrowing that leads to a rigid theory that fails when applied to more challenging texts. In addition it constructs a veritable cascade of homological terms and concepts borrowed from a variety of theoretical approaches that makes understanding of his theory nearly impenetrable. Indeed, many of the literary texts discussed in *Posthuman Metamorphosis* are mentioned again in *Neocybernetics and*
Narrative, which suggests that the theoretical approach only works with a very narrow range of texts.

§ récit, histoire, et narration

The three terms that Genette uses Discours du récit : récit, histoire, and narration; diligently translated as narrative, story, and narrating. Defining these terms Genette states:

I propose, without insisting on the obvious reasons for my choice of terms, to use the word story [histoire] for the signified or narrative content (even if this content turns out, in a given case, to be low in dramatic intensity or fullness of incident), to use the word narrative [récit] for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and to use the word narrating [narration] for the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place. (1980 27)

But the three terms that Clarke draws from Genette are: discourse, story, and narrating instance which he associates “not with the narrator’s but the author’s production” (2008 21). Between the first two he finds “the full template for the simple discourse-story distinction” between sujet and fabula that he establishes at the beginning of the section (2008 21). But there is no mention whatsoever of the term fabula in Genette’s essay, in English or French, Clarke conjures these distinctions on his own. His concept of story [histoire] comes from Todorov’s concept of récit comme histoire and while this fact is mentioned in footnotes to both the English and French edition no specific citation beyond this is given. As Clarke introduces these terms he defines them according to the topical examples at the beginning of Genette’s essay. But these are the definitions Genette proposes to stress the misuses of the term narrative [récit] – before establishing his terms and definitions on the very next page.
In an attempt to circumscribe “narrating instance” as a concept specifically aligned with the voice of the narrator Clarke claims that “only in the final chapter will Genette have recourse to the phrase” in discussion of the “narrative text’s virtual production by a (real or fictive) voicing – narrating – of its signifiers” but this is blatantly not true (2008 21). "L'instance narrative" is a term that comes into use in Genette’s discussion of Voice [Voix] and Mood [Mode] and in the footnotes to the English edition translator Jane E. Lewin’s states that “instance” in the sense of Benveniste’s “instance of discourse… appears throughout Genette's text” (1980 fn. 9 p 31). And again, this is not even Genette’s third term: "narrative discourse" which is clearly associated with narrating [narration] in the chapter on Voice (1980 213). As for the association of “narrating instance” with the author this is clearly not Genette’s position as he states:

[critics] identify the narrating instance with the instance of "writing," the narrator with the author, and the recipient of the narrative with the reader of the work: a confusion that is perhaps legitimate in the case of a historical narrative or a real autobiography, but not when we are dealing with a narrative of fiction (1980, 213; my emphasis)

Already on shaky ground, Clarke then associates ‘discourse,’ story, and ‘narrating instance’ with Mieke Bal’s concepts of story, fabula, and text commenting that she “cribbed large parts of her system from Genette” in her “three-layer model” (2008 21). Noting that with some alteration she divides the concept of discourse into text and story, and names her third term fabula which she describes as “a series of logically and chronologically related events” (Bal 1997 5).1 He then aligns the terms from Bal and Genette in Table 1.1:
Table 3.1: “Table 1.1” from Clarke (2008 23)

Clarke’s equivocations between Genette and Bal in Table 1.1 are already odd, especially since he claims that Genette’s concept of discourse divides into to Bal’s concepts of text and story.

The entire point of the first table seems to serve the function of associating Bal's concept of text with Genette's "narrating instance" in advance of nestling them together as "text: narration" in relation to "story: focalization" in Table 2.1, and this association is crucial to Clarke's attempt to link the narratological paradigm of Genette and Bal back to Luhmann and a systems-theoretical paradigm. To get there he takes us through a “Terminological Beastie” of associative terms and equivocations, a move we can avoid by simply focusing on the incongruencies at hand (Phelan qtd. 2008 21).
Table 3.2: “Table 1.2” in Clarke (2008 31)

The associations that Clarke tries to make in Table 1.1 suffer a significant blow when we examine the definitions that Genette gives for his own terms. We might assume that under the corrected terms that narrating [narration] can just take the place of “narrating instance” but in fact narrative [récit] would be the proper equivalent to Bal’s text. If we look at Genette’s definitions he clearly states narrative [récit] is “the text itself” (1980 27). Clarke verifies this correction through his attempt to provide a “semiological” understanding of Bal’s tripartite schema since narrative [récit] is also “the signifier” of the story [histoire]. Further the “semiological” understanding that Clarke applies to Bal is incoherent as she makes no reference to structuralist terminology in Narratology aside from the associating the text with “signs” in the appropriate chapter title (2008 22). The association is present in the second edition, which Clarke references. In the third edition the section titles appear as “Text: Words and Other Signs” and then in the fourth edition simply “Text: Signs.” This renders Clarke’s first table incoherent, with reference to Bal and Genette, the associations do not stand, and this imperils the associations made in the second one. Hence the need for the “Terminological Beastie”
that stands between the two. If there is a *coup de grace* for Clarke it's in the fact that narration and focalization are still terms that he can use, but it hobbles his attempt to draw parallels between Genette and Bal. Indeed, every reference that Clarke makes to Genette is now questionable since he clearly misidentifies what Genette’s terms and their definitions are. In fact, these terms are not even the focus of Genette’s inquiry.

The primary focus of Genette’s *Discours* are the relationships between narrative [*récit*], narrating [*narration*], and story [*histoire*]: time [*temps*], aspect or vision, and mood [*mode*]. Genette takes these categories he draws from Todorov's essay "*Les catégories du récit littéraire*" (1966 tr “The Categories of Literary Narrative”). Each of these aspects deals with the relation between two of the terms that he establishes in his working definitions.

The relational approach applied by Todorov and Genette derives from Hjelmslev. Proposing in his *Prolegomena* an "operative" approach that focuses on dependences between objects rather than a "formal" approach that makes these dependences secondary to an object oriented discourse. Hjelmslev describes this second approach as an act of "naive realism" that proceeds by way of "dividing a given object into parts, *i.e.*, into other objects, then those again into parts, *i.e.*, into still other objects, and so on." In such a scenario the first problem is always "the choice between several possible ways of dividing" and indeed this problem remains paramount in both Bal and Clarke’s methods (1961 22). Although Bal’s approach is quasi-relational it reinvests the relations between any two layers of her model into the third, unlike Genette whose focus is solely on the isolation of relations between two objects in absentia of the other. Verily she declares that
“focalization belongs in the story, the layer between the linguistic text and the fabula” (1997 146; qtd. in Clarke 2008 p. 28).

Time [temps] examines the relation between narrative [récit] and story [histoire]; aspect addresses narrative [récit] and narrating [narration], and mood [mode] concerns narrating [narration] and story [histoire]. The first three chapters of the Discours relate to time while Genette slightly realigns the terms of his discussion the fourth and fifth deal with Mood [Mode] and Voice [Voix] respectively. Genette explains in the last paragraph of his introduction that the fourth chapter on Mood concerns tense [temps] and mood [mode] which “both operate at the level of connections between story [histoire] and narrative [récit]” and the last chapter on Voice deals with “connections between both narrating [narration] and narrative [récit] and narrating [narration] and story [histoire]” (32). Clarke alights on voice and mood once he turns to his discussion of narration and focalization, but not intentionally, and it’s not even clear if Bal’s three-layer model is congruent with Genette’s at all apart from the association between his story [histoire] and her fabula

§ obscurantisme

Voice and mood do not cleanly associate to any of Bal’s categories. Although they do serve as primary aspects in Genette’s analysis they’re not necessarily grounded in any of the primary concepts of the discussion, rather they’re conjured into Clarke’s analysis mid way through, and they are only derived from the other direction. Through a series of conceptual permutations Clarke quickly transitions through a discussion that begins with Luhmann’s concepts of medium and meaning, cast in terms of Bolter and
Grusin’s immediacy and hypermediacy, cast in terms of Stanzel’s terms of medium and mediacy which then enters consideration of his figural narrative situation. In this situation the third-person or authorial narrator dissolves or is replaced by a character’s point of view but which still retains a narrative function. The mingling of the two is anathema to Clarke’s entire approach which leads him to Genette’s concept of focalization set up in terms of voice and mood.

Clarke apprehends the concepts narration and focalization as the difference between voice and mood, divided along the lines of identity aligning the narrator with voice and characters with mood, in other words as a question of identity. This is the very confusion that Genette attempts to escape in conceiving of the concept in the first place, specifically in context of “point of view” relevant to the identity of the narrator instead of a pure index of knowledge that the narrator has. To be clear: focalization is relevant to the index of knowledge of the narrator, not its identity. Genette draws his concept of focalization from Todorov whose concept of aspect is discussed in Todorov’s “Les catégories” as situations where the narrator either knows: more, as much, or less than the character(s). This is not a matter of pinning the narrative function on one person or another or else limiting what perceptions, feelings, thoughts or memories count as true narration: what is properly ‘inside’ the head of a character.

The association that he draws between Genette’s voice and Bal’s text is pulled through non sequitur equivocation to a systems-theoretical catechism of Maturana and Varela, and it is made in a moment of pure synesthesia. Clarke asserts that Mieke Bal’s vigorous development of the theory of focalization lifts it away from Genette’s discussion of narrative mood and grants it discursive autonomy as a principle nearly coeval with narration. (2008, 28)
Except Clarke has not discussed or proven this point. Arguably Bal’s conception of focalization stands on shaky ground, as will be shown, she merely focuses on the division between identities: specifically *who speaks?* And *who sees?* Yes, Genette poses these as questions in his *Discours* but he does so in order to distance himself from such a model since he finds it inadequate to the task. Specifically as most of the questions of “point of view” fall back into questions of identity, but with focalization the identity of the narrator does not matter. The narrator (if there is one) can be a character in the story or not, the only matter is a question of degree of knowledge. Genette does reference that he borrows from Pouillon on this concept and although Bal acknowledges this in “*Narration et focalisation*” (1977) she does not reference the influence of Todorov on this concept. In discussion of his own concept of *aspect* in “*Les catégories*” Todorov references Pouillon, but we will come to that.

Although there is a moment where Bal does qualify a special ‘coeval’ case between narration and what Clarke would understand as focalization as an internal memory or an “act of ‘vision’ of the past but, as an act, situated in the present of the memory” that remains properly a narrative act. Here she is also talking about what Genette calls the “narrating instance” which is an index of temporality regarding the narrator’s language which even suggests that the selection of ideas that Clarke makes from ball are not to the letter of the text (1997, 147). This has nothing to with the question of identity relevant to *who speaks?* It is merely indexical of the tense of speech. Oddly enough this is the false category that Clarke associates with Bal’s text but would rather fall under the category of story as an instance of the narrative discourse – that
Clarke parses these concepts and sets them up as different categories only evinces further his obsession with division.

Certainly, Bal’s estimation of memory as a narrative act makes it “coeval” with narration but this undermines his premise and has not been mentioned at all by him in his discussion to this point (nor does it appear in context of his discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway* in *Neocybernetics and Narrative*). He continues by quoting Bal directly:

> Whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision.’ (Bal 1997 142; qtd in Clarke 2008 28).

In the next two sentences Clarke immediately permutates this quote through a statement from Maturana and Varela that “*everything is said is said by someone* (italics in original)” (*Tree of Knowledge* 26) and *hey! presto!* He inexplicably declares:

> Had this been offered as a narratological remark, in Genette’s scheme it would apply to matters of voice – in Bal’s, to the layer of the text. In parallel with Maturana and Varela, Bal’s statement above could be rephrased: *everything seen is seen by someone* (narrator, character, or actor) *from somewhere* (within or without the storyworld). (2008 23)

The only problem with Clarke’s equivocation here is he has not made it clear how Genette’s voice is correlative to Bal’s text except by way of the link in Table 1.1 which is illegitimate. Syntactically the remark about “Genette’s scheme” to Bal’s across an em dash, in “parallel with Maturana and Varela” to “Bal’s statement” almost seems to retroactively resignify Bal’s quote about vision as Genette’s. Since his name is proximate to the quotation we might look back up and misattribute the quote. The entire paragraph is composed in purple ink, and this ramshackle equivocation bears full attention because it is the first time that Clarke even mentions voice and vision in context of Bal and Genette. And since it comes in the middle of a progression “of ever-proliferating
equivocations in technical jargon” deployed by Clarke the association will soon become a foregone conclusion to the pliant mind of the reader who won’t notice in three more pages that we’ve gone through a whirlwind progression from Luhmann’s terms of information and utterance in Table 1.1, to a brief discussion of medium and meaning, to a comparison of narration and focalization to the second-order concepts of operation and observation (Phelan 2006. 289 qtd in Clarke 2008 21).

§ operation is observation

Only by way of extreme distortion and willful misreading of Genette can Clarke cobble together a chain of signification that aligns his terms perfectly with the medium/meaning distinction that he sets up from Luhmann. Of course, those aren’t even the terms that Clarke aligns narration and focalization with, nor does he make any explicit argument to equivocate the terms to information and utterance taken from Table 1.1. The first ten pages of the chapter amount to little more than an exercise in extreme sophistry, because the terms that Clarke finally lands on are operation and observation and the explanation that he renders is entirely insufficient.

The issue at hand is that Clarke distinguishes the difference between narration and focalization as a difference between what he terms “narrative operation” and “narrative observation” (2008 31; Table 1.2). Luhmann states that, “every operation is simultaneously observation (with regard to the distinction between information, news and comprehension) and operation as the observed completion of the observation” (Luhmann Observations on Modernity fn 38, 118). Clarke even seems to recognize this, if only for a moment, but flees the point just as quickly.
To be clear: if every operation is both an observation and an operation, and every narration is an operation and every focalization is an observation, then every narration is already a focalization. The caveat by which Clarke exculpates himself is in the distinction between social system and psychic system, as he ascribes narration to the former and focalization to the latter, but to do so he applies a very narrow understanding of focalization that violates Genette’s understanding of the concept. The point of exculpation is that a social system is clearly distinct from a psychic system, insofar as they maintain a system/environment relation so that the environment of the social system is the psychic system and vice-versa. But if the focalization must be filtered through narration then the ‘psychic system’ in the text is expressed by the social system of the text / narration / narrative operation. However, in a narrative text there is no actual psychic system

The function of a focalization draws a distinction within the narrative itself by appearing to be an observation or set of observations from a more “restricted” point of view. The ‘focalization’ appears in the narration through a reentry of the form of observation – of being an observation within an operation of observation (the narration) that is already taking place. Clarke says as much: “focalization complexifies the category of narration by distinguishing a separate, embedded layer of narrative function” (2008, 31). This isn’t a controversial point, Clarke merely pitches it according to the outcome that best serves his rubric, and the only way his rubric works is if we imagine that there is an actual psychic system encapsulated in the text – which there isn’t. And again, focalization is merely an index of knowledge the narrative function has in relation to the characters in the text.
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§ Focalisations

Clarke provides a willful misreading of Genette’s concept of focalization that bends it to his own liking in order to justify his association of "text: narration" and "story: focalization" in Table 2.1 (2008 24-31). Although Clarke does take Genette’s relational concepts of voice and mood into consideration this is perhaps serendipitous, but as he attempts to correlate them to narration and focalization, which becomes problematic when he attempts to reinvest them into Bal’s text and story. Specifically, since the crux of aligning her terms with Genette’s correlated the concept of “narrating instance” with the text, which is correlated with narration in Clarke’s understanding, he offers no explanation as to how this gap is every bridged.

In his typology of focalization Genette describes four types of narrative: "nonfocalized narrative, or narrative with zero focalization"; the second is "narrative with internal focalization" that can be (a) fixed to one character, (b) variable across multiple characters such as in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, or (c) "multiple where the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view" across several characters, and while he evokes epistolary novels here he also mentions Kurosawa’s Rashomon (1950). The third type is external focalization wherein the protagonist "performs in front of us without our ever being allowed to know his thoughts or feelings" and the fourth is an internal situation which allows us access to such data (Genette 189-90). For the sake of reference these can be labeled accordingly:

1 nonfocalized (zero focalization)
2 focalized
   a fixed focalization
   b variable focalization
c multiple focalization
3 external focalization
4 internal focalization

The division that Clarke tries to impose on Genette is set up by Stanzel's distinction between narrator and reflector, applied to the concepts of narration and focalization. Clarke takes his conceptual understanding of these terms directly from Bal who insists that "focalization belongs in the story, the layer between the linguistic text and the fabula" (Bal 2017 135). This evinces Bal’s object-oriented approach, even though she sets up a relational paradigm the relation itself becomes reinvested in, instead of isolated from, the third term.

The idea that focalization is a ‘story’ bound concept is also is why Clarke's distinction in Table 1.1 becomes so important, because it allows him to recast "narrating instance" as "narration" and "discourse" as "focalization," and the distinction that he applies here is one "between 'who speaks' and 'who perceives,' narrator and focalizer" (Bal 2017 47; qtd in Clarke 29-30). Using Prince to verify that narration is akin to medium, as he attempts to link the entire cascade of terms back to Luhmann, but at the same time Clarke reads against Prince's assertion that narration is equivocal to focalization.

To do this Clarke applies Genette himself to note that "focalization is essentially . . . a restriction" (Genette 192; qtd. in Clarke 28) but what he omits in the ellipsis is the reference to Blin that explicitly equivocates the narrator with the character's point of view, in the second sense that Genette discusses a few pages earlier. To be clear, this is an equivocation between narration and focalization which stands in violation of the binary model that Clarke uses to set the two apart just as he tries to separate mood and
voice. But Clarke can't do that either because Genette’s entire point in introducing the concept of focalization is to construct "a typology of ‘narrative situations’ that would take into account the data of both mood and voice;" further clarifying that it would be illegitimate to "draw up a list where the two determinations compete with each other on the basis of an obvious confusion" (1980 188). Even an attempt to insist that nonfocalized narrative, or a point of view given by an "authorial narrator" ("AN" in Clarke's formal notation) is not some sort of restricted focalization is impossible because as Genette states: "the division between variable focalization and nonfocalization is sometimes very difficult to establish, for the nonfocalized narrative can most often be analyzed as a narrative that is multifocalized *ad libitum*" (1980 192). This quote appears on the same page, *immediately before* the quote that Clarke cherry-picks and obscures by dropping reference to Blin.

Focalization is indeed a restriction but that is the entire point of the concept. Before providing his typology of focalizations Genette references Todorov’s notations in “Les catégories” which express the degree to which the narrator knows more, as much as, or less than the characters which are represented in four general situations:

- NARRATOR > CHARACTER
- NARRATOR = CHARACTER
- NARRATOR< CHARACTER
- SEVERAL ASPECTS OF THE SAME EVENT

The first situation NARRATOR > CHARACTER is what Todorov calls “the point of view from behind” which is an instance where the narrator has more knowledge than the character(s) which is equivalent to Genette’s “nonfocalized” (1) situation where the author is subjected to “zero focalization.” The second, NARRATOR = CHARACTER is
“the point of view ‘with’” and this instance is equivalent to the “focalized” (2) situation in Genette. Todorov explains that in this instance the narrator “cannot supply an explication of events before the characters have discovered it” (Categories 24). Todorov notes that there are several possible variations which are typically situations where the term “point of view” is invoked noting that the situation can be fixed on just one character from either a first- or third-person perspective; a second permutation is a situation where “the narrator can follow, systematically or not, a single or several characters”; and in a third permutation the narrator can “be concerned with a narrative conscious of the role of a character, or a ‘dissection’ of his mind,” citing Faulkner as an example (Categories, 24).

There is a fourth permutation of this condition, SEVERAL ASPECTS OF THE SAME EVENT, that is not described until after Todorov’s account of the NARRATOR< CHARACTER situation, and in his designations Genette assigns this as the “multiple” (2c) instance. The permutations “fixed” (2a), “variable” (2b), and “multiple” (2c) denote the limitation of the narrator insofar as in the fixed (2a) instance the equivocation of knowledge is tethered to just one individual; in the “variable” (2b) instance the index broadens so that the distribution extends across multiple characters in Todorov’s second permutation of the “=” state. The “multiple” (2c) instance “where the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several letter-writing characters” (1980, 190). The final situation in Todorov’s notation NARRATOR< CHARACTER pertains to Genette’s “external” (3) situations where the narrator knows less than the characters. Genette’s fourth type, “internal” (4) focalization pertains back to Todorov’s
third permutation of the NARRATOR = CHARACTER situation where the narrator dissects the mind of the character as in Faulkner’s novels.

Both Bal and Clarke attempt to account for these types of situations, albeit in a rather ham-fisted way, through the use of a set of notation. Bal designates character bound [CF] or external [EF] focalizors; character bound [CN] and external narrators [EN] narrators which more or less pertain to the two planes of her “three-layer” system where the “two types of 'speakers' are to be found” in the plane of the text or the story (1997, 9). Throughout Narratology she redeployes this binary to designate different types of speakers in an attempt to isolate between these two planes so that: “CN2, . . . refers to a character that is 'quoted' by the narrator of the first level, whether that speaker is an EN1 or a CN1. CN2 is a speaker of the second level”; or "The EN1 may any minute start speaking on the second level as CN2, or do something else which makes it into an actor" (1997 44-45). There is a logic to this, but it ends up becoming more of an abstract shorthand, as in reference to Jealousy she claims that “focalization rests from beginning to end with the CF, and narration with the EN(np)” (1997, 29). Clarke mimics Bal’s notation in his Posthuman Metamorphosis but in a way that is less precise referring to a character-bound narrator (CbN) which at times is designated in his frame notations as ©; there is also the authorial narrator (AN), and figural narrator (fN) or “figural (non) narrator” of the figural narrative situation (FNS) since “there are, properly state, no figural narrators: there are only authorial narrators that lapse from strict externality . . .” (2008 74). He effectively drops this notation in Neocybernetics and Narrative although he continues to refer to “figural internal” and “authorial-external” narrators which distribute across the binary paradigm that he constructs when he applies George Spencer-
Brown’s frame notation from *The Laws of Form*. He also discontinues use of Spencer-Brown’s frame notation in *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, perhaps since it actually formalizes the proof that undermines his entire model.

Neither Bal nor Clarke make any reference to the typology of focalization in Genette, but briefly we can crate some equivocation between their understanding of what is and isn’t a narrator accordingly. Any reference they make to the “narrator” essentially equivocates to Genette’s “nonfocalized” (1) instance; Clarke’s “authorial external” narrator seems to reference Genette’s “external” (3) focalization but also the “nonfocalized” (1) instance. And then references to focalized situations: character narrators, character-bound narrators, internal situations, and the mutations thereof roughly equivocate to Genette’s “focalized” (2) and/or “internal” (4) situations at the same time. This is by no means to be considered a through effort to correct the use of their terms, merely an elaboration of the misunderstanding and prevalence of a reductive, binary logic in their discourses.

*N.B. That for the remainder of this chapter the term “focalization” is representative of their understanding of the term, not Genette’s, specifically in the application of the term to display its inadequacy as well as the inadequacy of Clarke’s method to analyze the literary texts discussed here.*

§ 3 *Mrs. Dalloway*

The conceptual deficits that arise at the very beginning of *Posthuman Metamorphosis* pass unchallenged into *Neocybernetics and Narrative* (2014), and unfortunately for Clarke his conceptual obfuscation extends not just to Genette’s narratological approach but also to his deployment of a systems-theoretical perspective. Case in point is Clarke's attempt to locate the analeptic scenes from Bourton in *Mrs.*
Dalloway to the figural-internal perspective of Clarissa and Peter's memories rather than the authorial-external (AN) perspective that dominates the rest of the text.

Clarke's argues that "the narration never formally leaves its ultimate enclosure within the observing frame of the authorial situation" and from this he concludes that the proper frame of reference for the entire novel is the day of Clarissa's party. By arguing that the analeptic breaks in the novel are figural narrative situations, internal manifestations of Clarissa or Peter, Clarke asserts that the "narration never formally displaces the reader from its continuous witness to the ongoing London day of Clarissa Dalloway and her fellow characters" but there are several problems with making such an assertion (2014, 98-99).

The first complication to Clarke's reading are Septimus and Lucrezia: their analeptic scenes are far more complex than the scenes at Bourton, and take up a variable position that fluctuates back and forth between the two through a nonfocalized perspective that is occasionally an intermediary position, but in some instances the shift is more directly internal to internal in a paralepsis without ever returning to the authorial frame. Although the return to the authorial moment, in the past or in the authorial 'present,' is not necessary for this transition to occur, the fact that this shift occurs at all weakens Clarke's point. But when the shift does linger through an authorial moment, even for an instant (a sentence, a paragraph, etc.) we must decide whether this authorial perspective is in the past or the present. To draw such a distinction is blatantly impossible unless we maintain that the moment is in the past according to the text that frames these sections, but if the moments on either side are also in the past then we are dealing with
not one but two temporal AN perspectives: one located in the past and one located in the 'present.'

These nonfocalized/authorial instances are often fleeting, but sustained moments such as the interval between their visit to the Tower and the onset of melancholy that prompts Dr. Holmes' visit force this problem into perspective (89-91). At such a point we must consider whether the authorial-external position is, in fact, a 'limited' focalized perspective itself in the third sense that Genette brings up, the *external* focalization (type 3) that is technically nondistinct from the nonfocalized perspective. Further, if we wish to ascribe the location of any given narrative perspective within the frame of the adjoining text then, at best, we can only say that the scenes from Bourton are figural-internal, but this determination is doubtful according to the third complication.

The second complication is that the spatio-temporal orientation of the AN simply violates the laws of space/time itself, and not in the way that might first come to mind. The obvious violation (which is not the second complication) is evinced by the paraleptic jumps across town in the sense relevant to Genette's conception of multiple focalization (2c) which again forces us to contemplate the possibility that the authorial narrator (AN) is actually a character bound narrator (CbN) that never makes itself present.

The second complication is, in fact, relevant to the interval between 11:30 am and 11:45 am: between the point where Peter departs from Clarissa's house and when he wakes up on the bench in Regent's Park, approximately two miles away from Clarissa's house – this is simply impossible. This is incredibly significant since this interval encapsulates one of Peter's flashbacks to Bourton, and in lieu of the text offering any clue to explain this anomaly there are two possible answers that immediately come to mind:
either this is a typo that went unnoticed (unlikely), or the space/time continuum of the storyworld itself is unorthodox and unstable. These options do not foreclose some other possibility, such as the unreliability of the authorial narrator (AN), but it deals a significant blow for any attempt to treat the narration as if it adhered to a principle of verisimilitude, unless one is to consider the fact that time itself is not the regular linear construct that Clarke's reading assumes it to be.

A similar situation to the obvious violation just stated exists in Beckett's novel *Watt*, although in this example the authorial narrator eventually introduces itself as a character named Sam within its own narrative, ostensibly a symbolic reference to the author himself: the common assumption for biocriticism that asserts that the author *is* the narrator. This assumption is redolent in the very term "authorial narrator" even if Clarke's deployment of the term functional and not literal, in the sense that would assert that Virginia Woolf is the narrator of *Mrs. Dalloway*. But what this functional orientation does presume is that there is a singular authorial narrator instead of multiple narrators and narrative voices. Indeed, Nicholas Royle writes that "voice in a work of literary fiction is never one, never purely or simply itself. Nor does it belong to one moment, to one time alone. There is always more or other than one voice. Voices go silent, are suppressed, come back. There is doubling and interweaving, polyphony, and ghostly absence or refrain" (Royle 18). *Mrs. Dalloway* is not like *Watt* in that the narrator never introduces itself within the narrative as a character bound narrator (CbN) and we therefore can't assume that there is a CbN in between the authorial narrator (AN) and the figural (non) narrator (fN) that Clarke identifies in the figural narrative situation (FNS). This would *not* conform to the schema that Clarke elaborates in his discussion of narrative situations
(2008 80-87) since he locates the FNS in between the CbN and the AN (see Clarke 2008 Fig. 3.13 and 3.14 p 85) but the possibility of this violation will not be discussed here.

But *Mrs. Dalloway* is a composite narrative, the product of a chorus of voices, or else multiple narrative strands: Clarissa's (present and past), Peter's (present and past), Septimus and Rezia's (present and past), that weave together along with scenes that focus on Richard's lunch with Lady Bruton and Hugh, Elizabeth's excursion with Miss Kilman, and a handful of other moments that are woven together in the frame of the authorial narration (AN).

Sam may only be one of *Watt*'s narrators the same way that the authorial-external narrator of *Mrs. Dalloway* is not narrated from a singular point of view, rather it is a composite of multiple voices and points of view, including the authorial narrator. Royle's criticism of the singularity of voice "relates, in turn, to how we might think differently about 'point of view' or 'focalization' in literary narrative." Royle's point is that these terms are indeed *terms* in the strong sense: they close off, they determine" what can only remain indeterminate, and undeniably this is the conundrum that Genette's third type of focalization (external) presses upon. The inability to say that the "*point or focus* is definite, single, clear and unified" in the manner that Bal or Clarke would assume is a condition that is often ignored in standard literary criticisms that employ terms like 'point of view,' 'focalization' (or 'focalizer' or 'focalized'). Royle calls such approaches "critical fictions" that are "part of a sort of shaggy-dog story that literary critics and theorists (in particular, narratologists) have been telling for decades" (Royle 18). This bears on the third complication which involves the violation of second-order observation itself, since such distinctions can only be made from a remove that casts these functions into a third-
order position, which would result in a cancellation and collapse of any potential embedded layers as Clarke demonstrates in Fig. 3.15 (2008, 86).

The third complication pertains not to the story but to Clarke's pejorative deployment of the very tenets of the second-order theory that he attempts to use in his method of analysis. Like the scotoma in one's field of vision, the blind spot that exists just inches from one's face, Clarke's own blind spot is so near to his method that the error is a rather understandable mistake. Unfortunately, for his effort the one fact that Clarke forgets is that the reader is already a second-order observer to the diegetic layer represented in the authorial narration, or any narrative situation, of the text. Any attempt to draw a distinction beyond that is nothing more than critical fiction. Although Clarke's project provides a useful explication of cybernetic theory through literary texts, its use value to analyze literary texts themselves is severely limited at best.

§ temps perdu

The concepts of space and time have been inextricably linked in the public consciousness from as early as the first decade of the 20th century, but even our understanding of time itself had been a matter of philosophical inquiry before Einstein's publication on special relativity “Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper” ("On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies") in 1905. One of the motifs of Mrs. Dalloway is the persistence of time, the endurance of past events, the way that certain locations are inextricably linked to moments in the past which endure and cannot be escaped even in the present. For instance, in the first few pages as Clarissa crosses St. James Park the text reads that "she would still find herself arguing" there with Peter the concepts of space and
time are already thrown into question by the novel (7). Bourton is literally another place: what is the difference between jumping out on to the street a few seconds earlier, or across the English countryside by a few decades?

Although the sounding of clocks becomes constant reminder of time's arrow through the happenings of the afternoon the time of the text is not sliced up into regular intervals. Sometimes the clock tolls and the text lets you know the exact time, others it just tells you the hour or the half hour has struck, but what time is it? Do you keep count? Do you count back? Do you even notice if it is Big Ben striking the half-hour "with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that" (48)? "But what was the time? -- where was a clock?"

Elizabeth wonders as she realizes the need to return home and get ready for the party. What time is it when turns up Fleet Street on page 137? Are you keeping count? Do you read back to find the last point the exact time was mentioned? So you can count back up to figure out what time it is? Do you turn back to page 94 where it tells you that it was "precisely twelve o'clock"? Are you sure you didn't skip over where it tells you that was "half-past one" on page 102? Did you miss where Big Ben rang out 3 pm? The most recent mention of time is on page 135, where it reads "Well, thought Clarissa about three o’clock in the morning, reading Baron Marbot for she could not sleep, it proves she has a heart" -- but that's not right. And is that 3 am in the past? Or is it a future perfect? Some moments linger while others pass quickly, and as the narrative perspective shifts and wanders in violation of perspectival conventions there is no reason to assume that the conventions of time are not violated as well.
To be sure, the clocks themselves become characters in a sense, each one with a different voice, a different personality. Big Ben clangs with a "direct downright sound" while St. Margaret's "glides into the recesses of the heart ... like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming down the stairs on the stroke of the hour in white" (48-50). But even the clocks, whose job it is to remind us what time it is, remind us also of its quirks the way that St. Margaret's does not begin to chime until after Big Ben has finished "like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already" and says "Ah, ... I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present" (48-50).

As St. Margaret's rings out back in Westminster Peter experiences a moment of profound happiness as "an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of [Clarissa], as if this bell had come into the room years ago, where they sat at some moment of great intimacy, and had gone from one to the other and had left, like a bee with honey, laden with the moment. But what room? What moment?" Just as the past is alive for Clarissa, still arguing with Peter in St. James Park, the ringing of St. Margaret's transports Peter to another time and place -- always a time and place, can we ever recall the past without recalling where we were, or even conjure a glimpse of some place or location? As the ringing of the half-hour comes to its end Peter's mood changes, "the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life," and Peter sees "Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room." Is this a daydream or a break in time? Is he in the past now or has Peter been transported into the present? "No! No! he
cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if there rolled
down to him, vigorous, unending, his future" (49).

The temporality of psychic systems is one thing, insofar as Clarke reads these
flashbacks as intradiegetic memories and "internal reconstructions of past experiences"
but cuts between perspective do travel back in time, if only slightly (2014, 99). The first
such example comes when the car backfires, the event happens twice in the novel: once
while Clarissa is inside the flower shop, and then out on the street from a perspective that
introduces Septimus and Rezia. And while the scenes of Bourton are more or less
associated with either the perspective of Clarissa or Peter, depending on the individual in
focus of the text either before or after these temporal digressions, the scenes of Septimus'
and Rezia's past are much more fluid and shift back and forth between the two.

Septimus is clearly stuck in the past, unable to escape the horrors of the war "the
dead were with him" still as he cries out for Evans as if he was in another time and place
(93). Or else he teeters back and forth, as in the brief moment just before his suicide
where he laughed, "he had become himself then" which in itself is still a representation of
the past: the way Septimus was after the war but before the onset of his post traumatic
hallucinations (144). Although it is the rupture of these hallucinations that brings the war
back, confusing past and present, that makes this happy state a reiteration of "himself" in
either case he is never able to fully reconcile with the present, for as quickly as he
resumes his jovial state he is back with "the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead" that
penetrate into Miss Filmer's sitting room (145). He cries out for Evans again, their
reunion in death is imminent.
The past is also alive for Rezia as she relives their past difficulties on a park bench, the burden of her memories weighing upon her as she trudges around London with her already dead husband -- Rezia lives partially in the future as well. As Rezia and Septimus wait for his appointment in Regent Park the text reads from her perspective: "I can’t stand it any longer, she was saying, having left Septimus, who wasn’t Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man" (65). In this scene we get the sense that Rezia might leave Septimus, might return to Italy. While in this instance she only leaves Septimus on the bench to walk around but as she thinks back over the onset of his affliction: his outbursts where he would make her write down "perfect nonsense ... about death; about Miss Isabel Pole" Rezia decides "she could stand it no longer. She would go back" (67). But back to where? Back to Holmes who said that there was nothing wrong with Septimus? Back to Septimus who notices that she isn't wearing her wedding ring and assumes their marriage is over? Back to Italy?

The analeptic shifts of Septimus and Rezia are entirely fluid: when they are in Regent's Park the focalization of the text shifts from Rezia’s thought, to the past tethered to her perspective, then Rezia speaks in quotations and we are cast in to the thoughts of Septimus (67). Does this exchange take place in the present? In the past? Does it matter? Bal states that the question of which time "can be declared primary is not especially significant; what is relevant is to place various time units in relation to each other" but this becomes extremely difficult at several points throughout the novel (Bal 76). Jumps in time and place are only relevant locally, for the reader everything is already in the past. Is this from an authorial perspective? From a focalized point of view? Both are possible as the scene bleeds from focalized Septimus to focalized Rezia, even as the scenes seem to
bleed back to the authorial-external, or nonfocalized perspective we can't always say if this is actually the correct perspective as Genette maintains that "the division between variable focalization and nonfocalization is sometimes very difficult to establish, for the nonfocalized narrative can most often be analyzed as a narrative that is multifocalized ad libitum" (192).

These minute cracks and fissures in the present open even further into the warping of time and space, the logic of which the narrative itself does not adhere to. From Clarissa's house Peter marches up Whitehall, across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket, then up to Piccadilly and up Regent Street to Regent's Park. The walk up Whitehall to Piccadilly takes twenty minutes alone, the full distance from Clarissa's House up to Regent's Park is approximately 2 miles. Peter finds a seat on a park bench, dozes off, dreams of Bourton, wakes up and passes by Lucrezia and Septimus as "the quarter struck -- the quarter to twelve" (70). To cover two miles in fifteen minutes, take a nap and then wake up is impossible. The hour must be wrong, it must be nearly one, even two -- but no, Sir William gave his patients "three-quarters of an hour" and it's only half-past one as Rezia and Septimus make their way down Harley Street after his appointment (99, 102). If even the present is out of joint then how can we so casually dismiss the presence of the past, or the future?

As the afternoon drags the hours slip by, unannounced from the interval between 3:30 and 6 pm, when Septimus kills himself. The clock strikes "one, two, three ...four, five, six" times as Rezia is given a sedative. It could even be past six, as time warps and stretches for Rezia as she fades away into somnolence leaving Mrs. Filmer's behind. "She put on her hat and ran through cornfields" with Septimus, "on to some hill, somewhere
near the sea," and in "London too, there they sat, and, half dreaming, came to her through
the bedroom door, rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the
sea, as it seemed to her, hollowing them in its arched shell and murmuring to her laid on
shore, strewn she felt, like flying flowers over some tomb" she fades into memory, then
sleep as they carry his body away (150). Almost as if time simply freezes from this point
on, nary the mention of a clock is made until the party when Clarissa steals away for a
moment. Apart from the mention of daily cues: the mention of dinner, Clarissa's neighbor
preparing for bed, the last mention of the hour is made in context of Septimus receiving
Clarissa's letter at 6 pm back at his hotel, and the last forty pages of the novel give us no
clear reference to time except for the arrival and departure of the party guests (150).

The party itself is like the sacred time of ritual: even as the counting of hours
gives way to the daily routine, the daily routine gives way to a sense of timelessness as
past and present merge into one singular moment of temporal duration. The party itself is
an irruption of Clarissa's "ordinary ways" practiced only for the fear of death or else some
abstract bourgeois angst. Her refusal of the warning is displayed in comparison to her
neighbor, the older woman who retires at a reasonable hour (171).

As Clarissa looks out of her window at her neighbor she thinks of "the young man
who had killed himself;" having just heard of Septimus' passing from the Bradshaws. The
clock begins "striking the hour, one, two, three ..." as it did for Rezia, but this time the
count stops at three although the clock keeps striking "the leaden circles dissolved in
the air" (186). A refrain to the novel itself: "first a warning, musical; then the hour,
irrevocable" as the counting of the hour melts away in this final instance so too does the
signification of the irrevocable (4). Stripped of its signification at the end of the novel
time becomes ambient like the sound of rain whispering down the hall or through the bedroom door. The warning becomes superfluous next to the embrace of death, the release of throwing it all away like a shilling into the Serpentine, "Fear no more the heat of the sun" Clarissa repeats to herself the same line of Shakespeare that came to mind that very morning in the wake of Big Ben's marking of the hour, as she pondered how "consoling" it was "to believe that death ended absolutely" the incessant and irrevocable counting of the hours (9, 186).

The entire novel builds to this moment: both to the party as well as the moment where Clarissa steps away and looks out of her window. Peter's return to London after so many years, Sally's unexpected arrival at the party, stepping out of the past into the present as unexpectedly as the arrival of Septimus' ghost -- "in the middle of my party, here's death, [Clarissa] thought" -- all of the narrative strands of the novel come together (183). As Clarissa steps away from the party she metaphorically steps out of time, and as the "leaden circles" of Big Ben dissolve in the air linear time itself is evacuated, her return to the party to rejoin Sally an Peter evokes a crossing of the threshold into sacred time where the past and present coexist in violation of time's arrow. In fact, the repetitions that Clarissa makes: the line from Cymbeline, the reference to the Serpentine, even the "leaden circles" of Big Ben dissolving into the air suggest a cyclical return to the beginning, a turn back in violation of the irrevocable unidirectionality of time.

As she rejoins the party she crosses the threshold into sacred time and the past is alive again: Peter plays with his pocket-knife, Sally "still attractive, still a personage," thought Peter (187). Sally has the same egotism and open desire as ever, even if the
"lustre had gone out of her" in Clarissa's estimation (171-72). And the moments of the past, from Bourton, become reintroduced in the conversation of the party: the scene by the fountain where Clarissa and Peter parted ways; the moment when Clarissa called Richard "Wickham"; Sally's ruby ring, that had belonged to Marie Antoinette, which she pawned to come to Bourton that one year -- "did absence matter? did distance matter? (187-89). No -- at least, not in this moment. Despite the physical change, the passage of time, the distance, the children, the complications of daily routine, all of that is cast off in this one moment. The dead and the living are both guests here, the reunion of past and present bends time's arrow back on itself, completing a circle. This loop stands outside of time, if only for the span of a few hours, the end of which is never signified in the novel.

In fact, the novel ends with Clarissa's reemergence "from the little room" where she goes off for a moment (186). The last few pages of the novel consist of Peter and Sally catching up, wondering where Clarissa is, waiting for her to reemerge. Sally grows impatient, gets up to say good-bye to Richard but doesn't leave. Peter promises to follow but lingers for a moment: "What is this terror? What is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?" (194). He looks up, Clarissa reemerges, the novel ends. For us, time persists, irrevocable; for the characters in the novel, time is frozen in this final moment of eternal duration.

§ espace perdu

Clarke's reading of Mrs. Dalloway is not outright wrong, the reading proposed here is not absolutely right either. When it comes to literary analysis we can speak of better or worse in relation to the text itself, one can be wrong in making an outrageous
claim or some conclusion that can't be supported by the text itself. The pronounal cues for the scenes at Bourton at least indicate an interior/exterior focalization tethered to one individual or the other. We can certainly see the split, the break between scenes, even the gestures that the scenes from Bourton are manifestations of the thoughts of Clarissa who "all day ... had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally" (184). The majority of the flashbacks to Bourton are associated with Peter as they come in context of his meanderings through London, but even when it comes to Peter we cannot assume that the first scene associated with him is a recapitulation of his dream, the narration of his memories that his dream evoked, or else a temporal/spatial leap to Bourton being narrated to us by the function that continually vacates or inhabits different perspectives and scenes (59). That this happens, allegedly within the fifteen-minute interval between his departure from Clarissa's and his waking on the park bench next to Septimus, casts a significant degree of doubt on the situation itself.

But this is all irrelevant to Clarke's assertion that these scenes are figural-internal memories tethered to these characters, anchored to a temporal baseline of the authorial narrator on the day of Clarissa's party, because from a purely systems-theoretical perspective one cannot make this assertion. In fact the only way that Clarke is able to make this determination is to vacate his position as the reader and assume the observer perspective of the narrative function, and assume that he is not already in a second-order position with respect to the authorial-external perspective that the text presents – and this is impossible. Clarke is already in a second-order position relevant to the first-order authorial-external perspective, and if the Bourton scenes are figural-internal to the psychic systems of the characters themselves, Clarke is technically in a third-order
position with respect to these scenes which is blatantly impossible from a systems-theoretical paradigm. Clarke's assertion can only be contingent, things could be otherwise.

Clarke tries to designate between an internal/external paradigm in setting off narration against focalization, words against experiences, although this ignores the "interior monologue" of a novel like *Jealousy* where the narrative perspective sits perfectly inside and perfectly outside of the authorial external narrator who is at the same time a character bound narrator. The objection could be raised that this is nothing more than the narration is the product of an external focalization from the husband's perspective but Genette already anticipates this through the example drawn from Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) stating that "external focalization with respect to one character could sometimes just as well be defined as internal focalization through another" (191). Focalizations are often various and multiple, pure internal focalizations are rare, and the concept of external focalization even crosses the line between focalization and narration, or at the very least blurs it to the point where the distinction does not matter. Seemingly inhabiting the position of the "authorial narrator," or narrative function until we realize that the entirety of the text is from an internal perspective, and even the external words: *Jealousy* presents a text so intimate that it is extimate.

The concept of *extimacy* is explored by Lacan as his seminar delves deeper into a topological approach, but theoretical cognates exist in the systems theory archive, specifically in Ranulph Glanville and Francisco Varela's paper "The Inside is Out" (1980). Clarke makes repeated gestures to psychic systems, especially in his
understanding of focalization inasmuch as he takes these instances to be experiential data, thoughts from the psychic systems of individual characters, but his understanding of them is strictly from a cognitivist approach. His discussions of cognition in *Posthuman Metamorphosis* frequently refer to either Luhmann's impoverished understanding of psychic systems, or else the dry formalism of information theory better suited to a discussion of computers than the human mind. And while he expands the conversation in *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, by and large Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* informs his understanding of psychic systems. Unfortunately, Bateson’s project in *Steps to an Ecology* remains limited to a first-order cybernetic paradigm, and in his *Seminar Encore* Lacan summarily declares that the effort presents a “rather mediocre conception” of psychic systems (XX 138).

Finally there is the point that he overlooks which is that in Bal’s understanding of narration and focalization that memory content is properly narration. As Bal *clearly states* in *Narratology*:

> A special case of focalization and perhaps the best justification for the distinction I am making is memory. Memory is an act of ‘vision’ of the past but, as an act, situated in the present of the memory. *It is often a narrative act*: loose elements come to cohere into a story, so that they can be remembered and eventually told. (1997 147; my italics)

In context of this quote Bal makes specific reference to traumatic memories, which obviously applies to Septimus but can also be extended to Peter’s situation since he spends the entire day working through the dissolution of his relationship with Clarissa through his memories of Bourton. Traumatic events “recur in bits and pieces,” since the “capacity to comprehend and experience them at the time of their occurrence” is disrupted (147). Indeed, just as Septimus is revisited by Evans on multiple occasions
throughout the text, Peter’s thoughts come back to Bourton again and again. Ultimately, Clarke even misrepresents Bal’s conception of focalization in order to cobble together his theoretical approach.

*Res ipsa loquitur.*

§ *scotoma*

The crucial error that Clarke makes is that he never defines the position of the reader in the framing schema proposed in *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, except for the moment where he seems to locate the theater audience at same level as an embedded frame of the play in Act II of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Clarke uses the play to explain the difference between first- and second-order observation, describing the scene where Oberon is watching Titania, Clarke establishes a distinction between the human world and the fairy world distinction: Titania recalls an act of observation (first-order) to which Oberon becomes a second-order observer, thus embedding the human order inside of a mark of distinction (Fig. 3.6) and then proposes that when this distinction is later reversed that the fairy world is rendered visible "to an audience placed at a second-order level of observation" as if the audience were suddenly immersed in the human world of the play itself -- but this is incorrect (Fig. 3.7 2008, 74).
But the audience is already at a level of remove from the human world, not immersed in the human world of the play.

There is a slight caveat here and it depends on the focus of our observation. Referential to the first instance where Oberon is in a second-order position to Titania's
observation we are already in a second-order position to Oberon's observation, in which case the frame reversal of the human/fairy distinction does not change the fact that we are still already in a second-order position if we are observing a human making an observation of the fairy world. If, however, our focus is not on a character making a second-order observation, but merely the stage itself then we are properly in a first-order position relevant to the action on the stage. This may seem a middling digression but it should be noted, this only applies to theater. When it comes to literature, we are properly making an observation of an observation whether the narrative is delivered by a character or an extradiegetic narrator. Film is slightly deceptive since it might seem like we are in the same position as we are in relation to the theater, but the theater puts us into a cybernetic experience insofar as the audience can affect the performance and/or the performance can spill into the audience. Literature and film are not immersive in the same way. Although Clarke's own description begins clear enough when elaborating the observer positions of Oberon and Titania his explanation becomes convoluted once he addresses the reversal, and he offers no satisfying answer for the collapse between the human and the theater in Fig. 3.7. Ostensibly the inversion of the human/fairy distinction aligns the human world on the stage with the human world in the theater, but this does not erase the fact that the audience (located in the theater) is always already in an observer position to the stage whether it is the fairy world or the human world that is on the proximate side of the distinction.

Relevant to the literary situation Clarke presents a similar schema in Fig. 3.14 which displays the figural narrative situation where C is the character bound point of
view, (fN) designates the figural narrator or more precisely to Clarke's notation the "figural (non) narrator" and finally the authorial narrator [AN].

Figure 3.3: Figure 3.14 from Clarke and corrected version

The problem with this representation is that it omits the reader, in which case a corrected schema would look like [Fig. X]. From this corrected perspective it becomes obvious that the reader is already in a second-order position relevant to the authorial narrator [AN], specifically if we localize the focalizations within the figural narrative frame (fN), at which point the position of the figural-internal memories becomes irrelevant. Even if we wish to locate the flashbacks to Bourton as a character bound situation, from a systems-theoretical perspective this distinction cannot be made. Everything embedded within the authorial narrative perspective is already removed from the reader's position, the distinction is functionally cancelled.
The closest Clarke comes to acknowledging the true position of the audience or reader in relation to a play or a literary text is when he acknowledges the unmarked space of the authorial narrators environment but he never elaborates the fact that the reader's observing system would circumscribe the entire schema he presents in his discussion of narrative situations [Fig. 3.12 pp 83]. He even leaves the reader out of the discussion when discussing potential third-order positions to note how they would violate the principles of second-order observation, from the authorial narrator's position.

Further, the approach is perfectly useless to address any text with a significant degree of embedding, since every frame after the first frame would is opaque from a second-order perspective, or else collapsed into the most immediate frame, as in Jealousy, so that no sense of depth can be determined. The only way that we could even begin to read a story that is embedded one or two frame layers in is to ignore the outer frame entirely. But if we have to consider that the outer frame is operational -- if we have to consider that the focalized perspectives in Mrs. Dalloway are embedded within the authorial narrative [AN] frame -- then there is nothing to be said, because there is nothing that we can say with any certainty. Unfortunately this includes almost every narrative text.
since most texts already have an implied or functional narrative frame, even if it is not specifically referenced through a narrator or narrative function that operates from the nonfocalized (or external) perspective of the authorial narrator [AN].

Clarke attempts to address this by way of two separate assertions: the first being that the authorial narrator "can recross the frames of the characters' storyworlds, as well as move across the boundaries of characters' psychic systems within those storyworlds, observing them from both sides" essentially granting the narrator telepathic powers (2008 83). There is nothing disagreeable with this assertion inasmuch as we can always understand an embedded series of enframed tales, like the [fable of Alfonce] as stories that are still subservient to the narrative function in the outermost frame. The second assertion essentially voices this point that "there are, properly stated, no figural narrators: there are only authorial narrators that lapse from strict externality" into a figural mode of narration attributed "to a character internal to the storyworld" (2008 85). This second assertion is more problematic, first because it makes the entire distinction between narrator and focalizer irrelevant since both sides of the distinction collapse back in to the function of the narrator, erasing the difference between "who speaks" and "who perceives" because the answer is now always the same: the narrator. This begs the question: why spend so much time trying to distinguish between the two if the difference is functionally irrelevant? Why the need to argue that the moments from Bourton are figural-internal moments within the characters' psychic systems if the entire artifice is merely a construct of the authorial narration?

The challenge that Clarke's approach faces in dissecting Mrs. Dalloway would be insurmountable when put to an extreme test against a novel like Robbe-Grillet's Jealousy,
even in its corrected form. We can appreciate that a character like Oberon or an authorial narrator sits in a second-order position to some embedded world of a text, we can even see the other side of that distinction if it is reversed, but without any indication that a threshold has been crossed it is impossible to determine. Such is the case with *Jealousy* which, like *Mrs. Dalloway*, gives us the perspective of the internal memories and fantasies of a character, except we are unsure what is memory, what is fantasy, and what is the present tense of the authorial narrator's position. In *Jealousy* we only receive the inkling of an indication that parts of the text are iterations of the husband's fantasies, as opposed to his memories, which says nothing of the struggle to parse memory or fantasy from a synchronous representation of the 'present' storyworld in the narration.

The reader will struggle to orient themselves in relation to any sense of a temporal order in the first place, the primary struggle besides this presses upon the question of the distinction between memory and authorial present in relation to some sort of plot structure or temporal order. There are a handful of temporal markers such as the moment when the centipede was crushed, ostensibly at a prior point in time to the instance established at the beginning of the narration, but aside from this and handful of other markers from a diegetic past the only indication of time in the novel centers around A . . . and Franck's discussion of the novel, his wife's (Franck's) illness, and then their plans to go into town.

From the systems perspective that Clarke tries to employ *Jealousy* can't be read, insofar as you cannot determine what is narration and what is focalization it throws the entire approach into unresolvable paradox. Is the dialog between A . . . and Franck in their discussion of the novel the actual content of their conversation or merely what the
husband remembers or perceives in the context of his jealous fantasy? Does he read
elements of their conversation concerning Christiane into their conversation of the novel?
We can’t tell, we don’t know. It’s spurious to suggest otherwise but then since everything
filters through the lens of the husband’s memory who knows what is real and what is
imagined, ultimately it’s all mere fiction. Every perspective that appears to be from the
position of an authorial or external narrator comes from a focalized perspective so that a
distinction can never be truly drawn. The mark can only ever be truly contingent, things
can always be otherwise. From a topological perspective these are merely local
distinctions: as with a Klein surface or a cross cap inside and outside are only illusions
since there is only one side to begin with. Any apparent distortion or distinction of
inside/outside is purely a product of dimensional embedding and can only truly make a
proper determination from an extrinsic point of view. For instance, the way in which a
Klein surface appears to be a "bottle" that intersects itself in three-dimensional space,
whereas in four-dimensional space this intersection does not occur.

Bal attempts to apply her rubric of parsing narrators and focalizors by using
Jealousy as an example in her book Narratology. A preliminary remark is that her
parsing of characters and narrators bears upon Todorov’s idea of mode which concerns
the concepts of representation and narration (Categories 26). At the same time, it strikes
similar to Todorov’s aspect of “being and appearance” or rather “several aspects of the
same event” albeit coded under the aforementioned mode. On the one hand it speaks to
the unspoken prevalence of a situation that Todorov’s understood as fark back as the late
1960s, on the other the general ignorance of his essay considering she does not reference
“Les catégories” in any of the iterations of Narratology. Her conflation of the concepts
verifies Todorov’s claim that aspects and modes are often easily confused. Particularly she seems to have devised a formal approach and notation scheme to address being and appearance stating that "only the narrator narrates, i.e. utters language which may be termed narrative since it represents a story." (1997 19). Her assessment implies a temporal disjunction between the narration as the representation of past events, opposed to focalization which is coded in a more 'immediate' temporality relevant to the past.

Although her remarks are brief they speak to the critical deficit of the concept rather than its “vigorous development” (Clarke 2008 28). Her first is that “focalization rests from beginning to end with the CF, and narration with the EN(np)” an astounding observation when taken in conjunction with her next remark:

almost all critics have termed that anonymous agent a specific character: a jealous husband. (Of course, the title has also been of influence here.). But more often, the narrative voice associates then dissociates itself from characters who are temporarily focalizing” (1997 29)

The main query in this instance: which characters? Arguably there are only three: A . . ., Franck, and the husband, apart from the handful of workers and servants on the plantation there isn’t anyone else, and the text notes a language barrier between the dislocated Europeans and the ostensibly indigenous (albeit displaced in a deeper sense of time) Negroes who speak with a patios that “detaches certain syllables by emphasizing them too much” (Jealousy 59). When the husband gets up to go to the pantry and encounters the boy already breaking the ice cubes free from their trays the text notes that “he speaks well enough, but he does not always understand what is wanted of him” reinforcing the presence of a language barrier (59).
As such we can either surmise that some of the perspectives offered by the text are indeed given from the perspective of the servants and transliterated, to an extent, into French, unless the possibility that some of the indigenous characters have a better mastery of French than the boy. This might explain the almost mathematical description rendered by certain portions of the text, the only problem is that these instances originate from a point of mastery, as the narrative gaze emanates from the house out onto the terrain of the plantation that surrounds it. Unless this perspective is also inhabited by an indigenous foreman, the attention to detail and consideration of the repairs and routine acts of maintenance belie the perspective of a proprietor assessing his property, including A . . . . Indeed the workers themselves seem to be little more than features of the landscape as the narrative gaze transitions from the rows of trees, to the man looking down into the water, to the image of A . . . through her bedroom window in various permutations of order.

Contrary to Royle’s postulate that the narrator is always a multiple of voices Jealousy stands out in that there can only be one character who provides the narration: the husband. His presence is signified by the number of place settings, the number of glasses, etc. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the narrative perspective emits from any other individual, and the only logical scenario of multiplicity is to consider that a range of perspectives are given from different internal functions of the husband according to the fourth situation of internal focalization that provides a dissection of the husband’s psyche. The only other possible alternative is that the narrative function is entirely depersonalized and shifts between variable (2b) and multiple (2c) aspects between the depersonalized narrative gaze and just one character: the husband, so that
internal states (4) enter into a rotation of variation between 2b and 2c, with the possible inclusion of an external perspective (3). In such a scenario the internal (4) and external (3) states could alternate along the variable (2b) and multiple (2c) aspects, but the only problem is that the external state (3) is never fully established since it never turns onto the husband who is clearly present, as indicated by the number of glasses, the number of chair, the number of place settings, etc.

Bal’s brief assertion about Jealousy does bear on the topological nature of the novel, and the degree to which it forces the reader to cut and suture the text, to play with it, despite her insinuation that there are more than one characters narrating the text. Simply put there are not enough characters in the novel itself, although there is the possibility that one of the servants inhabits the narrator function in some of the scenes her preliminary claim is unconvincing on its own merit.

§ murmurs

Clarke's assertions strain in the face of a text like Beckett’s Three Novels where the artifice of authorial identity becomes a recurring motif in each narration. At the beginning of each text the narrator identifies itself as the author in the first paragraph, indicating that what follows is their story. The problem develops gradually, as in the first half of Molloy the narrator does not identify himself as such for approximately fifteen pages until he suddenly exclaims under duress of police interrogation that “my name is Molloy” (23). Although this may seem insignificant, especially since he identifies as the titular character, as the text progresses the narrator begins to refer to Molloy in the third person. The separation is subtle, and each time the narrator re-inhabits the assumed
persona, but it in the final line of the first half the identity is evacuated stating “Molloy could stay, where he happened to be” (91).

Unsure of the narrator’s identity the condition becomes exacerbated in the second half of the novel as we suspect that Moran (the second authorial narrator) might be Molloy, or else the author of the first half. Eventually the text begins to refer to Moran in the third person in the same way that it does with Molloy, and the second time the narrator vacates the authorial persona in the final lines of the novel. While at this point the slippage is only relevant to the identity of the character, the authorial status of the narrator remaining intact, these evacuations give us a brief glimpse of the "invisible colon" that can be inferred at the start of a text, even where the frame of a storyteller telling a story does not exist (Calvino “Uses of Literature” 116; qtd. in Clarke 2008 105).

That the colon is revealed despite the frame is vexing, but in context discussing formal narrative situations, Clarke gestures towards its existence referencing Genette that "any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed" – except that in context of what he is trying to say this quotation does not make any sense (Genette 228, qtd. in Clarke 2008 p. 80). Contextually, according to Clarke’s argument, this would mean that the narrating act recounts an event at a diegetic level beyond its horizon, in his schema this would be equivalent to a character-bound narrator (CbN) narrating an event on the other side of the figural narrative situation, at the level of the authorial narrator (AN). This is blatantly incoherent.

Of course, what Clarke means is that narrations “are always observed from a virtual level that subsumes it” (Clarke 80). This is a pedantic point, but it bears witness to
Clarke’s fundamental misunderstanding of Genette, as well as his willingness to bend a quote that clearly contradicts the point he wants to make. In the footnotes to both the English and the French editions Genette is clear that “the metanarrative is a narrative within the narrative,” acknowledging that “this term functions in a way opposite to that of its model in logic and linguistics” (1980 228, fn 41). Accordingly, the “superior” or “meta-“ level is, in Genette’s terminology, is properly at a level embedded deeper in the narrative frame. Even still, there is still another frame to reckon with, the one that Clarke never acknowledges: the reader’s which hovers above the authorial narrator. As Todorov points out in The Fantastic, “obviously, nothing prevents the actual reader from keeping his distance in relation to the universe of the work” including the frame of the authorial narrator (84). We always occupy this position just above the frame of narration.

We receive some clarity about Molloy in Malone Dies where the titular narrator, an authorial narrator who is about to tell a few stories before his death, seems to take credit for the contents of Molloy. Identifying himself as “Malone” since is “what I am called now” we get a sense of déjà vu all over again but as the story he’s composing begins to resemble Molloy’s we perhaps feel at ease that this is the narrator of the first novel (Three Novels 222). Todorov warns against identifying the narrator as a unity or even with it psychological as an other, stating that “it is a mechanism internal to the text, a structural concomitant” and nothing more than that (Fantastic 84). In this specific context he addresses the first person-narrator/character, but one ostensibly in an authorial situation according to the conventions of the genre where the narrator narrates its own past from a frame of removal from which it can slip in and out of focalized moments, functionally recrossing the frame.
Indeed, this is the case with the narrators of the Beckett’s trilogy insofar as the first two narratives (Molloy’s and Moran’s) recross the frame from their authorial position into a figural instance as the narration progresses. The situation is slightly different with Malone since the authorial frame becomes a figural situation that the narration returns to from time to time, instead of a virtual space or a room left behind at the beginning as in the narrations of Molloy. Although the narration recrosses the frame between the tale of Sapo/Macmann to Malone’s own narrative little happens in the latter scene. Since he is bedridden the most that happens in Malone’s frame pertain to the changes that occur in his room while he sleeps, and inventories of his possessions, and a handful of abstract musings relevant to his room, the past or his impending death. Save for the retelling of a visit by a man who accosts him nothing happens, and events such as this or the interval where he loses his pencil are all retold post facto from an authorial frame of reference. Eventually the narration begins to slip as it does in Molloy, referencing Malone in the third person, suggesting that there is yet another authorial narrator that enframes this authorial narrative situation. By the point that this occurs we have already come to expect this regression en abyme, in anticipation of the true authorial frame’s revelation in the next novel.

The Unnamable voice present itself as the narrator of the previous novels declaring “all these stories about travellers, these stories about paralytics, are all mine” (412). Although it uses pronouns it resists this signification stating that “there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it’s a kind of pronoun too” (405). Refusing to take on a persona, the voice cycles through a series of pronounal
permutations – he, that, I, etc. Indicating that identity is merely a linguistic artifice regardless of the signifier the voice declares

there must be someone, the voice must belong to someone, I’ve no objection, what it wants I want, I am it, I’ve said so, it says so, from time to time it says so, then it says not, I’ve no objection, I want it to go silent, it wants to go silent, it can’t, it does for a second, the it starts again…

The Unnamable is total voice. Free of focalization, and although there is no real plot, nothing happens in the text except for the narration of a series of vignettes from an exegetic perspective text is pure narration. Surely this represents the authorial narrative situation in its purest form, except the frame of the invisible colon still hangs overhead, and eventually the Unnamable introduces the fact that it isn’t a single voice but rather an aggregate of voices, making it impossible to tell who or what is speaking Mahood? Basil? Worm? We cannot tell. As Nichoals Royle insists that “there is never only one voice, one point of view or one narrative perspective, at any one time, in a literary work” (Royle 20). The authorial narrator is as much an artifice as the ‘thoughts’ of characters in the figural narrative situation. Further the entire trilogy is permeated by a voice, a murmur, a something. It’s there throughout, it’s on the last page of Unnamable, it’s on the first page of Molloy. It undermines the entire idea that a distinction can be drawn between narrator and focalizor because at a certain point you can’t tell. You don’t even know it’s there unless you know to look for it, you certainly won’t know about It until you’re already read Malone Dies and The Unnamable.
To be fair Clarke acknowledges the reader in limited regard in *Neocybernetics and Narrative*, and more so than in *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, which seems to be an attempt to shore up the conceptual deficiencies outlined above. Of course, "texts do not read themselves" but they do function as "a kind of fractal border or interface" in the "complex relation between story and text [which] offers a structural parallel to Luhmann's technical description of the interpenetration of psychic and social systems" (2014 17-18). Clarke even *seems* to acknowledged that the reader is in the position of a "second-order" observer to the literary text, but the second-order point is forgotten as soon as it is made, and the reader is never integrated into his formal schema of narrative frames (2014, 96). Clarke's language here is extremely confusing, particularly in reference to the psychic system which in this instance is referent to the "complex relation" between story and text is specifically between the "signified psyches of narrators and characters" and "the narrative text" as a transmitted "selection of information" in a form ready to be processed within a social subsystem that also interpenetrates the reader (2014 17). But what of the reader? Where do they fit in? To be sure the reader is as much an afterthought in *Neocybernetics and Narrative* as it is in *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, and in the majority of instances Clarke deploys the term "psychic system" in reference to a focalized characters within the narrative text which are not properly psychic systems, merely imagined psychic systems (2014 94).

Ostensibly we have a privileged access to the text as "reader-observers" who "construe the text so as to burst into its storyworld," through a process of "interpenetration of psychic and social systems" – a fanciful notion at best (2014 98).
A novel is not a virtual reality simulator. A good novel may be engrossing, but the text is always an external object that we observe from an external position, and through the narrator the storyworld to us is a second-order observation whether through the function of focalization or narration. Even in the cinema, or the theater, where the viewer is seemingly 'immersed' in a textual environment of visual and auditory stimulus there is still a threshold, the text remains an external object that we can only synthesize internally. To be fair, Clarke does seem to recognize that we are not literally immersed in the storyworld as the "reader or viewer of a narrative text, as the actual observer of this discursive structure" but rather invited "to enter an imaginary cognitive state" (2014 96). But we need to be careful here, things are not as they seem. Clarke’s description of the reader’s relation to the text in this instance is vague and unspecific, and potentially contradictory, which leaves us to decode what he is trying to say.

This "imaginary cognitive state" is the moment that we are invited to inhabit in order to construct a "fabula from which the narrator stands apart" and "perform" the "fictive traces" of the psychic and social systems within the narrative. This is the point where we assume the "second-order" position as we perform the fictive traces of the narrator -- from the level of the authorial narrator (AN) not from an observing frame above outside of the text (2014, 96-97). This unmarked space, the frame of the colon that hovers above the authorial narrator, the second-order problem itself is completely ignored. Instead Clarke reverts to a "telepathic logic according to which a narrator—and thus a reader" become fused into one entity, as if the narrator were the seamless interface between the reader and the text or the story, or whichever side of the distinction the
reader is supposed to interact with in order to gain access to the *fabula* (Royle qtd. in Clarke 2014 28).

Certainly, the text anticipates the reader, as demonstrated in Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night...* where “you” the reader become a character in the story and specifically addressed by the narrator. Indeed, every text was written with the intent that it be read by someone at a later point in time. But this does not mean that a telepathic link arises between the narrator and reader, or even the reader and the text, even through the process of structural coupling. As Hans-Georg Moeller points out that “structural coupling between psychic and communication systems does not turn thoughts into communication or communication into thoughts. We cannot continue a conversation by simply thinking about what someone else says” (Moeller 19).

Ostensibly some degree of interpenetration takes place in the invitation to this “imaginary cognitive state” as he references the “virtual telepathy of the authorial narrator” whereby “narrative signs typically replicate their readers’ limits of knowing precisely in order to surpass them” but since this involves the activation of “narrative structures” interpenetration cannot properly occur (2014, 96). Specifically, as Clarke maintains that interpenetration only occurs through autopoietic systems, which excludes media technologies including writing, narrative, and language, interpenetration cannot occur here (2014, 15).

Whether or not Clarke is aware of the second-order problem is debatable, were the telepathic properties of the text real the answer would be apparent, alas it is not. In *Posthuman Metamorphosis* Clarke at least seems to be aware of the problem of a possible "third-order' narration" but the entire concept is circumscribed within the contextual
frame of the authorial narrator. His answer bears upon his first assertion, that this rectifies
the conundrum or levels out into a second-order form by the narrator's horizon (2008
84). But he never considers the possibility of a third-order situation from a perspective
external to the text or the narration itself -- never acknowledges the position of the reader
in the setup. Once we reintroduce the horizon of the reader everything beyond the
horizon of the narrator is contingent, even the apparent "second-order form of authorial
narration" that reenters the authorial situation is beyond the pale of the reader (2008 84).
For all his deployment of tautological cyberbabble the one thing he forgets is “the
possibility always exists that things are otherwise” (my italics) (Observations 45).

§

Accordingly, Clarke's approach becomes little more than a makeover of
narratology in the vestiges of cybernetic jargon, a reformulation that abandons the tenets
of second-order theory. Clarke's exclusion of the reader is symptomatic of a general
tendency in systems theory to completely ignore psychic systems, or else to reduce their
existence to a purely functionalist operation that takes place according to very dry
definition of cognition.

The application of a systems theoretical perspective helps us to stay grounded in
the fact that the illusion of depth is only that, but on the other hand it robs us of the
opportunity to apply our imaginations and be creative, sucking all of the fun out of
literature in the process. There are some texts, readerly texts for example, that do not
stress the creative aspect of reading as much as writerly texts; they still engage the
imagination of the reader by the very nature of their medium but to a lesser degree. As
Barthes elaborates in his distinction between the readerly and the writerly the former encourage a passive consumption on the part of the reader rather than the role of active participation that the writerly thrusts the reader into.

In *Pleasure of the Text* Barthes declares that "Text means Tissue;" woven of words but also weaving the reader into the fabric of the textual narrative. Emphasizing that "in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving" between reader and text "like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web" in the act of reading the reader’s subjectivity dissolves and is reconstituted itself within the fabric of the narrative (64). But this occurs at a limit, the fractal border that Clarke mentions.

Through the process of reading the text becomes an *extimate* object that is "topologically situated at the point of a meeting" between the inner and outer, as Jean-Louis Baudry discusses in his essay "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" the "exterior world may penetrate the interior and assume meaning."

Citing photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, Baudry underscores that "this may seem paradoxical in an art which is exterior" especially with visual media like the cinema or photography but -- this goes for the cinema as well as the literary text -- “it is the interior which commands" (Bresson qtd. in Baudry 1974 p44 fn 23). A text may seem immersive but we aren’t literally granted access to the diegetic storyworld, this is only a function of the imagination, a dreamlike hallucination.

The appearance of psychological depth, the illusion of layers or frames within frames, etc. are just artifices of the art form itself. There is no real depth, no structure, the thoughts of characters merely commentary, the appearance of any *mise-en-abyme* is
merely a literary trompe l'oeil. But in the mind of the reader a space opens; in a metaphorical sense the imagination of the reader adds another dimension to the equation or object of the text, granting it a venue to take on the properties of another dimension. The same way that a two-dimensional surface of a topological plane can be transformed into a Mobius strip that appears to have the depth of three dimensions, in a virtual or metaphorical sense the language of the text can be embedded in the mind of the reader where it unfolds, expands, and takes on extra dimensions.

Certain texts -- metafictions especially -- indulge in the illusion of depth through formal artifice and narrative frames. As readers we should not let this fact prevent us from indulging our imaginations by opening them up as a space for these texts to unfold and manifest themselves as such. As critics we should extend this principle and take the implications of this condition to their logical end that not only is there no real depth in the text -- any illusion of depth merely being a symbolic construct given an arena in an overlap with the imaginary of the reader/subject -- but also that there is no depth behind the text. This is a specific appeal to the death of the author, especially in the act of conflation that assumes the author to be synonymous with the narrator function in the way that a term like "authorial-external" suggests. Pragmatically the figure of the author or author-narrator is as much a fictitious character as any other character or character-narrator, and like the depth of the text of itself only exists as an illusion in the mind of the reader.
When advanced copies of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novel *la Jalousie* were first sent out the critic at *Le Monde* initially assumed the “he had surely received a copy whose pages had been mixed up by the printer that it was a jumbled mess” and his response was not alone (1977, 3). The response from Gerald Prince was not much different, and in his initial response to the novel he proclaims that "it becomes impossible to establish any kind of chronology ... then we are no longer in the presence of a narrative." (Prince 65). But there obviously *is* a narrative there. A bold statement, but also one that misunderstands what narrative is. Prince does however concede that *Jealousy* is a novel, and Emma Kafalenos observes that he eventually recognizes the need for a more inclusive definition of what is or is not a narrative text (1992, 381 fn 1).

It also underscores the inadequacy of the conventions so often deployed to judge texts designed and constructed according to an entirely different set of rules. Prince’s assessment is rather obvious: no plot, no narrative. Indeed, his assessment is reminiscent
of Victor Shklovsky’s opinion that the *fabula* of a story is irrelevant, as Todorov explains that for the Russian Formalist “only the discourse [sujet] was for him an aesthetic construction” (Categories 5). But indeed, *Jealousy* presents a meticulously constructed aesthetic form. In his dialog “Order and Disorder in Film and Fiction” (1977) given at the University of Chicago’s Festival of French Arts held in 1976 he notes that he spent two years on the novel’s meticulous arrangement.

Discussing the response that his novel received, Robbe-Grillet expressed his surprise at the fact that none of the critics or reviewers who seemed to grasp a structure that he assumed would be “so obvious.” Eventually he realized that “the word "order" probably did not have the same meaning for them and for me. For them it was a question of established order, and for me it was a question of creating an order” according to his approach to the *Nouveau Roman* (3).

The title of the novel itself is a play on words, referring to a louvered window made of glass or wood, or else a type of window blind with a similar structure, and this structure refers to the form of the narrative itself. The text only gives us narrow slices of information "through the chinks between its wood slats," the narrative itself is a "silhouette in luminous parallel strips” that only gives us a partial glimpse of what is really going on in the same way that the narrator can only apprehend a partial view of A . . . and Franck through the window of the office as they sit on the veranda in silence (72). Between the blinds, and through views distorted by imperfections in the glass windows that look out to the courtyard from the front room, even as the novel proceeds by way of a visual orientation the distortions of the text render the image as partial, opaque, incomplete.
In the open left leaf of the first dining-room window, in the middle of the central pane of glass, the reflected image of the blue car has just stopped in the middle of the courtyard. A . . . and Franck get out of it together, he on one side, she on the other, by the two front doors. A . . . is holding a tiny package of indeterminate shape which immediately vanishes, absorbed by a flaw in the glass.

The two people immediately come closer together in front of the hood of the car. Franck's silhouette, larger than A . . .'s, conceals hers behind his. Franck's head is bent forward.

The irregularities of the glass obscure the details of their actions. The living room windows would give a direct view of the same spectacle and from a more convenient angle: both people seen side by side. (131)

Every reference to a window in the text monstrates the point that objectivity is impossible, that the entire scene is not captured in the present frame of the window. The narration only gives us slices of information, partial scenes that block out details in the same way that a set of half-open window blinds cuts up the view through a window. If there are no blinds then the view is distorted the same way that “circular or crescent-shaped spots of verdure” distort the view of the courtyard at the front of the house (70). Or if the window is open and the blinds are open that something is always just outside of view, blocked out by the wall adjacent to the window frame.

*Jealousy* is an incredibly demanding text that puts the reader to the test, and formally it is *tour de force*. As readers the point of view that we are situated and locked in to assuming is a position of pure interiority from the husband’s limited perspective. Objectivity is called into question throughout the novel. Although this is not apparent initially, as the flood of details seems to speak to the opposite point that the narrative reconstructs a purely objective perspective. The narration provides the details of the plantation with such mathematical precision that it easily lends to the notion that it presents us with some perfectly objective, mechanical perspective. One so precise that it could not possibly be human. The first pages of the novel include a map and a legend,
detailing the layout of the bungalow. The narrator describes the geometry of the
bungalow in a way that render it almost visible, or else spatial in the kinesthetic sense.

We receive a scant amount information about some things and then too much
information about others, and it becomes hard to sift through it all especially given the
repetitive nature of the text. From the very beginning the narration gives us obscure
details that may or may not be important, details that we don’t know what to do with. Do
they hold the key to a mystery? Or are they superfluous, obsessional details that mean
nothing in relation to the mystery at hand? On the first page the text reads, “The heavy
hand-rail of the balustrade has almost no paint left on top. The gray of the wood shows
through, streaked with tiny longitudinal cracks” (39). The narration describes the
balustrade numerous times, it needs to be repainted. Does this mean anything? There is a
man on the bridge over the river looking into the water, Franck squashes a centipede in
the front room leaving a mark (a question mark?) on the wall. Are these clues? Do they
signify any meaning?

There are four chairs on the veranda but only three places are set at the dinner
table since Franck's wife Christiane is at home taking care of their child who is running a
slight fever. Christiane has difficulty with the humid climate, her problems with her inept
servants are numerous – as are Franck’s excuses for why she could not make it to
dinner— the servants remove her setting at the dinner table. There is a third person there,
of course, always alluded to by the third table setting or the three glasses, the narrator
never speaks of him because he is the narrator: the jealous husband who watches A . . .
and Franck constantly. He watches their gestures at the dinner table; he sees them
through the thick glass window at the front of the house. Although we may not sense his
presence at first, even as it is clearly suggested by the third place setting at the dinner table and the third glass on tray on the veranda, as we read deeper into the novel the husband begins to materialize, but only in an ephemeral sort of way.

At the same time, as the narrative progresses and the husband materializes the sense of objectivity begins to fade. The way the text is constructed, the return to certain scenes and images, the way that scenes are repeated and juxtaposed outside of their temporal order – now A… and Franck are back from their trip, now they sit on the veranda discussing their plans to the point of exhaustion – suggests the frenzied thought process of the jealous husband trying to piece things together, to make sense of it all. The repetition *Jealousy* evokes a depth, but it’s one that can’t be accessed. Just in the way that the perfectly clean windows in the front room distort the view of the courtyard, the “circular or crescent-shaped spots of verdure” have the “same color as the banana trees in the middle of the courtyard in front of the sheds,” depending on one’s vantage point from inside the house one would be hard pressed to say that what they see is in the verdure of the window or the courtyard itself (70-71). The narration flattens the entire scene: room, window, courtyard, into the plane of the window, and yet it is from that flattened plane that we can reconstruct the depth of the scene.

The charge Price levies against *Jealousy* is not uncommon when it comes to experimental or difficult texts, In this instance Prince is specifically critical of the fact that the story cannot be organized into a clear temporal succession, which actually suggests that his issue is not with the indeterminacy of the *fabula* but rather the difficult posed to the reader in terms of reconstructing a virtual plot or *sujet*. *Jealousy* clearly has a *fabula*, indeterminate as its temporal organization may be we can certainly reconstruct a
sense of order, at least in an abstract sense: the mark on the wall from the centipede is extant and predates most the events contained in the text, A . . . has gone to the port on previous occasions with one or more plantation workers, Franck and his wife have come to visit with a sense of frequency. Some events seem to be iterative and it is hard to discern whether these instances are indeed reiterations of the same event, part of a routine. or vignettes which seem to have no immediate function within the context of the virtual plot.

**But what is a plot?**

Is the plot of a story a straight line through a novel? Can we literally go down to the line of the text and say that the plot is the line that we follow through to the end? In “Les catégories du récit littéraire” (1966) Todorov explanation of sujet from Tomachevski he writes “la façon dont le lecteur en a pris connaissance” or the way the reader has read (1966, 126-27 my translation). Curiously enough, Todorov never says the word “plot.”

Joseph Kestner inserts the term “plot” into his translation of “The Categories of Literary Narrative” (1980) but the French text never mentions the word “plot” which warrants a closer look at the text itself:

> Ce sont les formalistes russes qui, les premiers, ont isolé ces deux notions qu'ils appelaient fable (« ce qui s'est effectivement passé ») et sujet (« la façon dont le lecteur en a pris connaissance ») Tomachevski, TL, p. 268 ("Les catégories" 126-27)

But this makes things even more confusing, or clearer depending on how invested one is in the concept of “plot” because the prior translation that was just given in the previous paragraph needs refinement. Indeed, Kestner translates the definition of sujet as "the
manner by which the reader has gained knowledge" (Categories 5). Obviously the reader has “become acquainted” [a pris connaissance] with the story by reading it, which says noting about the plot at all. Certainly by virtue of this determination Jealousy has a plot.

But what if we need to read back to a scene because we’ve forgotten something? Or what if the text itself brings us back to the same “plot” point, returns to the same scene, the same image, and restarts the narration from that instance? As in Jealousy where the narration itself restarts several times, or at least seems to, as the text repeats the same basic line at the beginning of the novel at the head of two more sections:

Now the shadow of the column – the column which supports the southwest corner of the roof – divides the corresponding corner of the veranda into two equal parts. (39)

The second iteration comes about ten pages on from the first:

Now the shadow of the southwest column—at the corner of the veranda on the bedroom side—falls across the garden. (50)

And the final iteration near the end of the novel:

Now the shadow of the column falls across the flagstones over this central part of the veranda in front of the bedroom. (134)

In fact there is a fourth iteration of this line within the first section of the novel, just a few pages in:

Now the shadow of the column—the column which supports the southwest corner of the roof—lengthens across the flagstones of this central part of the veranda, in front of the house where the chairs have been set out for the evening. Already the tip of the line of shadow almost touches the doorway which marks the center of the façade. Against the west gable-end of the house, the sun falls on the wood about a yard and a half above the flagstone. (42)

While there are subtle differences between each of these ‘beginnings’ one has to read in for a moment to try to discern what time it is, and then only by the position of the
shadow and the sun in the sky is this possible. The problem that arises is that it is difficult to tell if these iterations (after the first two on pages 39 and 42) mark a progression of time across the span of days, or else the repetition of time within the same day. This is not the only reiteration in the novel either, for instance, the narration repeats the episode where Franck crushes the centipede during dinner (leaving a mark on the wall) five times. Also, A . . . and Franck discuss their plans to go down to the port at least four times. Does this signify the passing of time and the discussion of plans across several days? Yes, but they discuss their plans twice after they have already gone to town. One of the effects of these repetitions, these restarts (or false restarts) and the atemporal succession of events is to frustrate the sense of a plot, as well as the ability to read for the plot. But not our ability to read.

Robert Scholes comments in The Fabulators (1967) on the idea that there is a “suppression” of the plot in the novels of Robbe-Grillet and John Hawkes, noting “when I read them I find myself responding to an intense, forward-moving pressure, a real narrative flow” (69). Although in context Scholes gives specific attention to Hawkes, but Jealousy is the only novel of Robbe-Grillet’s that he mentions in his book. But then what do we mean by “plot”? Why do we use the term? Where does it come from? Todorov is a universal source for the translation of the terms fabula and sujet and yet Todorov does not mention “plot.”

The same insertion happens in translation of Todorov’s “Typologie du roman policier” (1966) where Richard Howard inserts the terms “story” and “plot” for us next to the words fabula and sujet respectively. But when we look at the syntax in French we see something else:
Ils distinguaient, en e et, la fable et le sujet d'un récit : la fable, c'est ce qui s'est passé dans la vie; le sujet, la manière dont l'auteur présente cette fable. La première notion correspond à la réalité évoquée à des événements semblables à ceux qui se déroulent dans notre vie; la seconde, au livre lui-même, au récit, aux procédés littéraires dont se sert l'auteur (Choix ed. 1978 12)

Which translates:

[The Russian Formalists] distinguished, in fact, the fable and the subject of a story: the fable is what happened in life; the subject, the way the author presents this fable. The first notion corresponds to the reality evoked by events similar to those taking place in our lives; the second, the book itself, the story, the literary processes used by the author. (Choix ed. 1978 12 my translation)

Who told us we could ever say the word “plot”?

Сюжет / sujet : plot, story, subject, chapter
Фабула / fabula : plot, story

Who told us we could ever say the word “plot”?

Certainly the concept refers to a linear sense of time, from point A to point B as in the travel narrative, the hero’s quest, the story that takes us there and back again. But if we come back again haven’t we returned? Indeed as Claude Bremond reformulates the idea of what a plot line is based upon the possible stages or plot points proposed by the Formalists, and yet if you were to ask someone to plot a story that involved a return journey they would still use the Freytag sequence.

![Freytag (1863) and Bremond (1970) Diagram](image)

Figure 4.1: Freytag Sequence and Bremond Cycle
Is it relevant to the stream of information that we are given, in order, by the narrative function? What if we skip ahead a few pages by mistake? Who orients the line? Whose order do we speak of when we say the word “plot”?

Obviously this term refers to some sort of pragmatic principle of organization, to the artifice of the author, the storyteller, the way in which the abstract raw material is related to us in some form or another. Todorov says as much that the “time of the discourse is, in a certain sense, a linear time, whereas the time of the story is multi-dimensional” (Categories 20). But then we are not talking about the arrangement of events as they happened, this isn’t always possible, or desirable. Even the inversion of temporal succession is preferable for the desired effect as when the story begins with a dead body in the first scene and works it way back to the beginning c→b→a to find out the motivation for the murder. Or else in some other permutation c→a→b where we begin with the body and work our way towards the murder, knowing the motivation the entire time; or not, which can make the revelation as to how or why the murder happened that much more of a shock.

**time of the narrative [temps du récit]**

As he begins discussing the time of the narrative in “*Les catégories*” Todorov first talks about temporal distortions in the story, and he begins by discussion not of the story or of narrative or of storytelling he begins by talking about sound. Quoting the psychologist Lev Vygotski at length who discusses the ways in which the conjunction and alternation of sounds can have different effects,
“two events, or actions, when put together, yield a certain new dynamic relation that is entirely determined by the order and disposition (arrangement) of these events. . . . Disposition and arrangement of events in a story, the combination of phrases and sentences, of concepts, ideas, images and actions is governed by the same rules of artistic association as are the juxtapositions of sounds in a melody, or those of words in a poem.” (Vygotski qtd in Todorov “Categories” 21).

The introduction of danger at the start of a story can affect the reader’s expectations, telling the reader that the protagonist is in danger but not what the danger is creates a different effect than introducing the murder at the beginning. Of course it is more difficult to blend the narration of events than to create different effects by blending two different sound waves, but the gesture towards sequence and order is predictable. Indeed, he goes on to qualify how the Formalists focused only on the “récit comme discours” not the “récit comme histoire”—the narrative as discourse and not the history behind the telling (Les catégories 139). But what he says next is far more compelling, in fact it throws things into absolute chaos or rather perfectly exemplifies the problem of order. Insofar as the expectation that this act of telling, the speech or discourse, the story’s arrangement induced in the reader, or else the expectations a reader has in approaching a story.

![Freytag Sequence (Five Acts)](image)

**Figure 4.2: Freytag Sequence (Five Acts)**
It is appropriate to note that Freytag created his model based upon the study of Greek and Shakespearean tragedies from an Aristotelian perspective. His sequence introduced in "Die Technik des Dramas" (1863) proceeds according to the movement of these dramas in five acts: exposition > rising action > climax > falling action > denouement. Somehow this aesthetic principle came to overcode what the Formalists were more interested in. Yes, sequence mattered because that is the way in which the story is told, or else understood by the reader. But the Formalists had a slightly different aesthetic in mind, they were not concerned with Greek or Shakespeare, as Todorov proceeds towards the end of the section he states that:

> The Formalists ignored therefore the narrative as story, focusing only on the narrative as discourse. This is comparable to the theory of the Russian film producers of the era: these are the years when montage was considered the properly artistic elements of film. (Categories 21 my emphasis)

**Why didn’t anyone tell us about montage?**

This changes things significantly. Obviously when we learned about Formalism and structuralism older ideas were packed into the new terms, terms that we can’t even decide on how to translate in the first place. Todorov then goes on to talk about the different methods referencing *les Liaisons dangereuses* he writes that “the most complex forms of literary narrative contain several stories” proposing three different methods of arrangement: *linking, alternation, and embedding* (Categories 21). In a *linking* one story is told to completion and then the other begins; *embedding* is the story within the story, making specific reference to the *Arabian Nights; alternation* is when two stories are told so that one constantly interrupts the other.
While the first two retain their ties with the oral tradition Todorov notes that the third has not, citing Hoffmann's *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (1819), Kierkegaard *The Gospel of Sufferings* (1847) and certainly the epistolary novel bears mention: Diego de San Pedro’s *Cárcel de amor* (1485) is considered the first epistolary novel and the *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-87), attributed to Aphra Behn, is among the works that are claimed to be the first novel in the English language (there is a list of the ‘first’ novel in English). This suggests that alternation its origin in a purely literary tradition, that it is a recent form of storytelling. Why do we judge it by the models of ancient Greek dramas?

**Montage**

Montage changes everything, it is cinematographic. In his essay “The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram” (1929) Sergei Eisenstein writes that “cinematography is, first and foremost montage” (28). Montage is imagistic, Eisenstein makes explicit reference to the hieroglyph, and Kabuki theater, the combination of images into the ideogram. Single objects are brought together to create a concept: “the picture of water and the picture of an eye signifies = ‘to weep’; the picture of an ear near the drawing of a door = ‘to listen’;

- a dog + a mouth = ‘to bark’;
- a mouth + a child = ‘to scream’;
- a mouth + a bird = ‘to sing’;
- a knife + a heart = ‘sorrow,’ and so on.

But this is – montage!” (30).

But montage is not harmonious don’t be fooled by the appeal to the aesthetic pleasures of the Kabuki theater, the references to *haiku* or the *tanka* which Eisenstein describes as “hieroglyphs” transposed into phrases. So much so that half their quality is appraised by
their calligraphy” (30-31). While this does make them analogous to the ideogram, the careful construction of the ideogram, the “austere combination of symbols” is merely one aspect of montage (31). There is certainly the evocation of harmony in montage, but conflict as well. Eisenstein gives a list of cinematographic conflicts within the frame:

Conflict of graphic directions. (Lines – either static or dynamic)
Conflict of scales.
Conflict of volumes.
Conflict of masses.
Conflict of depths.
Close shots and long shots.
Pieces of darkness and pieces of lightness.
Conflicts between an object and its dimensions – and conflicts between an event and its duration.

Even the distortion of the lens itself can be used to the effect of conflict (39).

At a formal level Jealousy proceeds by way of montage. The clashing of images, the conflict that arises between sequences and scenes that seem to repeat or be placed out of time. Or even the lack of time, the way in which the narrative progresses by regression or repetition so that time is condensed, compressed, non existent. Eisenstein elaborates this dimension of montage in Japanese theater which “makes use of a slow tempo to a degree unknown to our stage” (43). The slow tempo creating a conflict in time through the apparent duration of the image, the slowness, the lack of movement.

In “The use of Theory (1955 and 1963)” Robbe-Grillet writes that

Each novelist, each novel must invent its own form. No recipe can replace this continual reflection. The book makes its own rules for itself, and for itself alone. Indeed the movement of its style must often lead to jeopardizing them, breaking them, even exploding them. Far from respecting certain immutable forms, each new book tends to constitute the laws of its functioning at the same time that it produces their destruction."

(For A New Novel 12).
In Jealousy nothing seems to happen, scenes replay themselves but the narrative doesn’t seem to progress at all, and then it does, and then it doesn’t. As the text pours over the descriptions of the same objects and instances it becomes difficult to tell if these images are being created or destroyed, or else rebuilt from the rubble of half-seen images and false memories. As the narration progresses it pours over the same scenes in order, out of order, if we can even detect a sense of order to begin with because the repetitions of the text only gives us a sense of disorder. A . . . and Franck discuss their plans to go into town again, and again, then they’ve returned, then they’re discussing their plans to go to town again. “Franck tells a story about his car’s engine trouble, laughing and gesturing with a disproportionate energy and enthusiasm” but does this take place in the present or in the past (88)?

The accuracy of the entire narrative is rendered suspect once the husband imagines A . . . and Franck’s activities in town. When the narrator imagines Franck’s car bursting into flames it becomes clear that we cannot mistake this attention to detail for objectivity. Nevertheless since this instance comes towards the end of the novel it confounds the reader who has assumed that the text was faithfully objective up until this point, necessitating the instance of a second reading in order to reassess the text, even though by this time the objectivity of the narrative perspective should be called into question by the repetitive and asynchronous nature of the text.

The text’s repetition and asynchrony is directly called into question in the fourth ‘chapter’ or section that begins “In the hollow of the valley” (73). Near the beginning of this section A . . . and Franck discuss their plans to go to town; then the text briefly fades to their discussion of the novel; then their return. A . . . returns to her bedroom, then
enters the bathroom, the text quickly skips over mention of the other bedroom (where the husband must sleep?); then the table is set for one, the text mentions the mark on the wall left by the centipede and the table is set for three. Now A . . . and Franck are discussing their plans to depart for town. Is this a second instance or a repetition? Have A . . . and Franck already gone into town with one another before? The text is not clear, but it does indicate that it is surprising that “such an arrangement should not have already been made, one day or another” ostensibly in reference to A . . . ‘s going into town with Franck, instead of asking one of the plantation workers to drive her there as is the usual case (79). Of course, this is all narrated in retrospect, every story can only be told analeptically, but the way in which the text weaves in and out, back and forth between scenes and points in time flattens the temporality of the narrative rendering it unimportant.

Unimportant, but at the same time significant, since the effect speaks to the status of the narrative as the husband’s ratiocination, the only object the text is representative of is the distorted thought process of a jealous man. Brandy-soaked glimpses of neurotic repetition, the attention to detail in the physical description of objects is merely compensation for the absence of evidence. The qualification of every smile or attribution to every gesture remain superfluous in the final analysis, these can only be read as second hand accounts open to the distortion of memory and subject to the interpretation of the fabulator – an entirely human perspective. As the husband tries to figure out if something is going on between A . . . and Franck we as readers are invited to assume his position, but at the same time this is impossible. We are shut out the same way that he is excluded from the conversation between A . . . and Franck.
The play of depth in *Jealousy* is deceiving, while the narrator is reduced to a zero degree – he is nothing more or less than a voyeur, a camera, we only know he is there by the number of places set at the table, the number of chairs put out on the veranda, the number of glasses on the tray – the narration seemingly absent of affect. And yet, just as the repetitions of the text help to reconstruct the layout of the house (and if necessary one can always turn back the map at the beginning), the way in which these repeated scenes are put together suggests the psychical depth of the narrator who suspects his wife is having an affair. The text gives us an image of pure exteriority, and yet what we actually get is the opposite, all that is presented in the text is purely interior – purely inside the head of the husband. But the absence of any personal pronoun or self-referential signifier renders this point of view unfamiliar. The only time the narrator even references himself is when A . . . and Franck are talking about the book and he references himself “a third person” and even here it is one has to read closely and carefully not to mistake this reference for one to the driver who is mentioned immediately at the beginning of the next sentence.

Scenes slide in to one another, even though in this instance it is still the same scene, it’s just that the attention of the narrative has momentarily fixed on a new detail, and so that is what registers in the narration. How does one parse fact from fantasy? What is a repetition that takes place purely in the imagination of the husband? What is a frequent occurrence that the text shows us several times as it should – or shouldn’t if it’s just a minor detail like the description of the balustrade, unless that means something.

We can only grasp for meaning in the same way that the husband tries to grasp for an inkling or an inclination as to what is going on between A . . . and Franck, if anything.
Perhaps they just enjoy each other’s company in this isolated place, strangers in a foreign land surrounded by natives who do not speak the language. Neglected (or not) by a spouse that seems preoccupied with other things, lonely and without friends to talk to.

We can’t even be sure if this is the case, if A . . . or Franck feel neglect or not, until the possibility is introduced by the novel within the novel we don’t even perceive a sense of negligence, or even that they are having this conversation in front of a third person. Indeed, this is the only time in the novel where the narrator references himself as the narrator and even then the text creates a sense of ambiguity as the attention of the narration slides off to fixate on one of the workers on the plantation who are constantly present, but who have blended in to the scenery and whose constant presence is only registered intermittently. The text reads:

Franck smiles in his turn, but answers nothing, as if he is embarrassed by the tone their dialogue is taking—before a third person. The movement of his mouth ends in a sort of grimace. The driver’s voice has shifted. ... (126-27)

In the immediate moment we do not know what this means, if the driver is the third person, if his voice shifts upon noticing Franck’s supposed embarrassment. As the new paragraph continues we realize that it is one of the drivers who can be heard from the front of the house. The text mentions them before coming back to fixate on the conversation between A . . . and Franck, but as the attention of the narrative constantly shifts it is often difficult to follow as moments are reimagined and the descriptions of several scenes bleed into one another along with the iteration of the jealous husband’s own fantasies.

A . . . and Franck go to town, the trip there and back should take them all day if they leave early, they should get back by around midnight, they don’t. “Nevertheless
there is no lack of probable reason for delay” the narrator tells himself: an accident, two punctured tires that necessitate an extended effort to make repairs, an electrical problem, another driver in need of help on the long rural road between the port town and the middle of nowhere, driver’s fatigue which postpones return until the next day (108). The narrator imagines a whole list of reasons why A . . . and Franck might not be back in time, but as the narrative turns to consider hypotheticals it becomes impossible to tell what is real and what is fantasy, or even what detail that is added or subtracted in the scene of a flashback is real or else a product of the husband’s imagination, but it does becomes clear at a certain point that he can only imagine certain things that are narrated in the same flat way as everything else, like the fiery death of A . . . and Franck as they race back from the port:

Franck, without saying a word, stands up, wads his napkin into a ball as he cautiously approaches, and squashes the creature against the wall. Then, with his foot, he squashes it against the bedroom floor.
Then he comes back toward the bed and in passing hangs the towel on its metal rack near the washbowl.
The hand with the tapering fingers has clenched into a fist on the white sheet. The five widespread fingers have closed over the palm with such force that they have drawn the cloth with them: the latter shows five convergent creases. . . . But the mosquito-netting falls back all around the bed, interposing the opaque veil of its innumerable meshes where rectangular patches reinforce the torn places.
In his haste to reach his goal, Franck increases his speed. The jolts become more violent Nevertheless he continues to drive faster. In the darkness, he has not seen the hole running halfway across the road. The car makes a leap, skids. . . . On this bad road the driver cannot straighten out in time. The blue sedan goes crashing into a roadside tree whose rigid foliage scarcely shivers under the impact, despite its violence.
The car immediately bursts into flames. The whole brush is illuminated by the crackling, spreading fire. It is the sound the centipede makes, motionless again on the wall, in the center of the panel. (113-14)

The mechanical precision with which the narrative progresses is deceptive.

Established very early in the novel the attention to detail gives the reader the sense of a
purely objective, omniscient narrator. But there are scenes narrated that can only be the product of imagination, such as what the husband imagines happens in the hotel room in town. Once the narration introduces these neurotic ideations it casts doubt over everything that has already been narrated, shattering any sense that the reader may have had as to the objectivity of the narrative perspective.

If not through the metaphorical allusion made in the title to the distorted and cut up views seen through windows in the narrative, then by the repetition of memories intermingled with fantasies as the text enacts the narrator’s effort to process the details of his memory and figure out if his wife is having an affair with his neighbor. As readers it is as if we are wiretapping some channel in this thought process, hooked into some node of information processing that is either anterior (or subtending) to his symbolic subjectivity, and possibly even at a locus in the unconscious of his psychical architecture. At the same time full knowledge is inaccessible.

The narrator is both present and absent -- both to the reader on a formal level but also at the level of content as A . . . and Franck carry on as if he was and wasn't there at the same time. As the pair discuss the novel that Franck lends to A . . . the day before: set in tropical Africa, the heroine cannot bear the climate just like Franck’s wife has trouble in the tropical climate of the diegetic storyworld. Franck then makes a reference, obscure for anyone who has not even leafed through the book, to the husband's behavior. His sentence ends with “take apart” or “take a part,” without its being possible to be sure who or what is meant. Franck looks at A . . ., who is looking at Franck. She gives him a quick smile that is quickly absorbed in the shadows. She has understood, since she knows the story. (47)
“No” the narrator corrects the narrative, “her features have not moved” he reasons that the “fugitive smile must have been a reflection of the lamp, or the shadow of a moth” (47).

The novel in the book becomes a connotator, an embedded narrative, but also object en abyme that refers to the level that enframes it. A . . . and Franck talk about the novel at several points in the narrative a she reads through it. It seems to have some hidden meaning, either for the narrator who may or may not be reading too deeply into a novel that he has never read things which may or may not be in the novel. The conversation over the novel resumes later in the text, A . . . and Franck discuss Christiane’s health as they make their plans to go into town, the proper dosage of quinine, the effects it has on the heroine in the novel. Franck makes an allusion – obscure for anyone who has not even leafed through the book – to the behavior of the husband, guilty of negligence at least in the opinion of the two readers. His sentence ends in “take apart” or “take a part” or “break apart,” “break a heart,” “heart of darkness,” or something of the kind.

But Franck and A . . . are already far away. Now they are talking about a young white woman—is it the same one as before, or her rival, or some secondary character?—who gives herself to a native, perhaps to several. Franck seems to hold it against her:

“After all,” he says, “sleeping with Negroes. . . .”

A . . . turns toward him, raises her chin, and asks smilingly: “Well, why not?”

Franck smiles in his turn, but answers nothing, as if he is embarrassed by the tone their dialogue is taking—before a third person. The movement of his mouth ends in a sort of grimace. (126)

This time the smile is apparent in the light of day, but what of the meaning of their discussion? Does A . . . ‘s defense of the heroine’s promiscuity refer to her own infidelity? Is she cheating on her husband the way that A . . . may or may not be cheating on the narrator? It becomes difficult to tell, which is the point of the novel since the
jealous husband is also unable to tell whether A . . . and Franck are having an affair. Is their shared understanding referent to the novel or else to something else? Is Franck’s alleged embarrassment because the third person is present? Does it signal his guilt? Is it even embarrassment born out of guilt or else born out of some sense of manners?

Does the conversation over the novel have some special meaning between A . . . and Franck? Or is it just a lure for his (and our) attention, an insignificant point that the narrator seizes and fixates on. Can we draw any allusion between the heroine and Christiane’s health? Or else between the heroine’s sexual indiscretions and A . . . ‘s possible affair? Is there some metaphorical connection between the cuckolded husband in the novel that A . . . is reading and the potentially cuckolded husband in the novel that we are reading? Or is the function of this connotator merely a lure to capture our attention and synchronize our gaze with that of the jealous husband?

Analysis of the novel can only proceed by way of question, since we are hard pressed to be certain about anything. Everything swirls and repeats. The narration describes the same scenes or the same objects several times, or else several different instances in similar fashion. Details that aren’t immediately relevant intrude into descriptions of other scenes, like when A . . . calls for ice and the boy doesn’t come immediately and the husband gets up to check on the ice, as he stands in the pantry door the spot on the wall, left by the centipede, suddenly captures his attention. It needs to be repainted, but from this angle it isn’t visible, that the text even mentions it at this point is irrelevant to his telling the boy to get the ice cubes that he is already removing from their trays.
“He would scarcely have had time to go take A...’s orders on the veranda and return here (outside the house) with the necessary objects” which means that he must have heard A... call, or did he? “‘Missus, she has said to bring the ice,’ he announces” which makes the husband “question as to when he received this order, he answers: ‘Now,’ which furnishes no satisfactory indication. She might have asked him when she went to get the tray” (59). The husband is confused and unable to get a satisfactory answer out of the boy who he has trouble communicating with in the first place. The whole scene is a riddle. Did A... suggest that the boy didn’t hear to try to get rid of the husband for a moment? Did she suggest that one of them should go check the pantry and then not make any indication to get up in order to force her husband to leave so that her and Franck could be alone for a moment? To do what? Share some secret? A kiss? Make plans for a tryst later? Ultimately that depends on the way the reader understands it.

The problem with structuralist rubrics are not the concepts themselves, inasmuch as they can be used as tools to discuss narrative texts, rather the issue arises when they become necessary conditions to determine whether what is and what isn't a narrative text. Or how we understand it. If we let the binaries of Formalism overcode our concept of what is and is not inherent to narrative, or the text, instead of letting the text tell us itself, then we are no longer reading the text – we are ignoring it. In such an instance we are merely reading ourselves.
Notes

Introduction

1. We will not speak of the sections of at least two of these ur-chapters that were removed for considerations of length and due the slight conceptual shift necessitated by the manifestation of the third chapter qua a chapter unto itself. Several of these sections still exist and were merely banished to other projects, although in the final analysis there remained anywhere between twenty and a hundred pages of text that were too disgusting to exist: these words were printed out and ritually burned after all versions of the ur-chapters were deleted.

2. Seminar II p 190 English


4. [Links to images and Stack Exchange question]

Chapter 1: Three Novels

1. This will surely come in handy later.

2. Boulter confirms a “Moebius strip effect” (2008, 117)

3. See Boulter 2001, 62

4. It should be noted that, while the example depicted in Fig. 1 presupposes that a complete revolution along the length of the Möbius strip is necessary to accomplish a mirror reversal, the same effect would also occur by simply traversing the edge of the manifold (by going ‘up’ or ‘down’).

5. Weeks indicates that when the reversed flatlanders return to their town that all the words on signs appear backwards to them. Their state of reversal also leads to disorder as they travelled on the wrong side of the street and generally seemed strange to the townsfolk who had not been mirror reversed (Weeks 46-7). This helps to explain the confusion that Molloy experiences while in his own town as he wanders the wrong way after his discharge from the police station.

6. the reversal can be undone simply by completing another circuit along an orientation-reversing path.

7. list of "complete" permutations of order (this list can never be complete)

   I > II > Malone > Unnamable
   II > I order > Malone > Unnamable
   II > Malone > Unnamable > I
   I > Malone > Unnamable > II
   I, II > Malone > Unnamable (where I and II are standalone)
   II, I > Malone > Unnamable (where I and II are standalone)
8. Not only does the *je, moi, je* variation get homogenized into a flat series of signifiers *I, I, I*; but the English translation of this sentence removes an emphasis on this sentence that is conveyed by the disjunctive form. *Moi* is a disjunctive pronoun and when positioned [at the beginning of the sentence / before the pronoun/verb/participle] it conveys a position that puts emphasis on the subject.

9. Since *C’est moi* is a stressed pronoun being used in an emphatic position this distinction is lost and the loss of the disjunction removes an emphasis that is present in the French.

10. See also: *Fantastic 80* re: “conditioning” Reading a normal novel for all you know. Experimental stream of consciousness you might wonder, a few pages in. Let’s not even consider how it relates to the other novels in the trilogy, the manner in which the terrain will unfold.

11. Joyce Tangent: Nor should it be dismissed in a text that makes a rather obvious reference to *Finnegan’s Wake*, written in a language that is notorious for its equivoques and entendres…. if not as an homage or nod of association, let an acknowledgement that he [Beckett] had somehow inherited the mantle that was once bestowed upon Joyce. Perhaps as an indication that *there will be puns here too! But they’ll be in French!* Perhaps a thumb to the nose in the direction of a land that he left, which spoke a language that he had repudiated.

Chapter 2: Metafiction

1. In this instance Caxon who not only publishes but reworks and translates from Latin the texts of Petrus Alphonsi (born Moses Sephardi), a Jewish polymath from Spain who served as court physician to Henry I of England in the early 12th century (10, see also Millás and María 144).
2. a version of which appears in his 1979 book *Fabulation and Metafiction*

Chapter 3 *Discorps du texte*

1. Qtd. in Clarke p. 22 *NB* the page number of the quote is misattributed in Clarke
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B


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— *La Plaisir du texte* (1973)


— *Malone Muert* (1953)
— *L’Innommable* (1953)
—


13.


F


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L

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— *Poétique de la prose* (1971)

— and Richard Howard. *The Poetics of Prose* (1977),


ADDENDA¹

¹ The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation
Chapter 5

*Murphy*: A classical case of misadventure

*Murphy* is easy to overlook, if not for its publication nearly two decades before the production and success of *Godot*, then for its banality. Compared to the rest of his oeuvre *Murphy* is rather unremarkable and boring. It is silly but not nearly as absurd as other texts; avant-garde, but perhaps more than retrospect, and then only by association. Whimsical in a way that *Watt* also is, but not nearly as ambitious. There is a certain way in which *Watt* fails to attain the ambitions that it gestures towards, ambitions which become realized in the trilogy; but *Watt* also fails to work as a novel in a way that *Murphy* actually succeeds. The scraps of text in the appendix of *Watt* attest to this, although on the same token the inclusion of these scraps and the gesture towards incompleteness may simply signal the ambition of the novel to fail -- which would be an attainment of that ambition.

There is something to be said about form in Beckett’s prose, since his entire fictional œuvre can be considered as a constant exercise in form. From the baroque syntax of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* -- written in 1932 but not published until
1992, three years after Beckett’s death – to later works like *Worstward Ho*, Beckett’s novels (and fizzes) are experiments in the form of deterioration just as Robbe-Grillet observes that “Murphy, Molloy, Malone, Mahood, Worm – the hero of Beckett’s narratives deteriorates from book to book” (*New Novel* 111). As Brian Finney points out that after 1960 Beckett’s fiction takes “the form of what he variously called ‘residua,’ ‘capua mortua’ or ‘têtes mortes’” that “cultivate an art of minimalism” (Finney 858). But *Murphy* is neither baroque nor minimalist, it is closer to the mean. Finney describes it as Beckett’s “most accessible novel” but there is a complexity and density in the text by way of puns, paradox, allusion, repetition, inversion” etc. (Finney 847). The first sentence of the novel parodies the first book of Ecclesiastes; Neary is an acronym for ‘yearn’; and in Murphy’s contemplation of the “etymology of gas” the text quietly alludes to the Dutch chemist J. B. Van Helmont (1577-1644) who first isolated gas and then “named it for the chaos of the ancients“ (Ackerly 154). While perhaps less ambitions than some of Beckett’s other novels, at the same time *Murphy* is deceptively complex, and it becomes a key text to understanding the configurations of later fictions in Beckett’s œuvre. So much of Beckett’s work is based upon variation, repetition, and permutation. The dance of *Quad* (1981), Krapp replaying his tapes, the shifting of position in *Come and Go* (1965).

§ Introduction to *Murphy*

*Murphy* contains a first iteration of elements that reappear in his later fictional works. Brian Finney identifies that in *Murphy* “Beckett pictures for the first time the
skullscape of consciousness” that becomes “the principle arena for his major work” in later novels (Finney 846). Murphy considers his mind to be like a Leyden jar, “a large hollow sphere hermetically closed to the universe without” a comparison also made by Molloy, and a condition of existence for the voice in Unnamable (Murphy 65). Indeed, Murphy is hunted down by another man, unbeknown to him, in the way that Moran pursues Molloy; and he gets a job at a hospital outside of town, taking the place of another just like Watt. These are mere examples, more curious than consequential, at least from the outset. But therein lies the rub, as so often is the case in Beckett’s fiction that what first appears to be innocuous or even forgettable often becomes the hinge on which the story pivots, or element that radically changes the meaning of everything else in the novel and rewrites our very understanding of the text.

**Murphy** is a marriage plot, or at least seems to be, but it presents a tragicomic inversion of this classical stock material and parodies the genre in a dry way. Celia, Murphy’s fiancée, expects him to get a job so they can afford to get married, but in an ironic inversion the job Murphy takes becomes a means of escape from their relationship. His flight to the outskirts of London is not the first attempt to escape the amorous expectations of a would-be bride, Murphy has already fled to London from Dublin, ostensibly to the purpose of gaining the fiscal means to return to marry Miss Counihan, who dutifully awaits a return which will never come. Instead of trying to find work Murphy is content to live in destitution and perform the ritual which he first learned from a charlatan from Cork named Neary, who has his own amorous intent towards Miss
Counihan; but she denies these advances in expectation that Murphy will return to make good on his promise to return with the means to make an honest woman of her.

The familiar desires are there, the conventions of the genre: the struggle to find fortune to the end of blissful matrimony; the affection rebuffed by one who loves someone else, etc. In the first chapter we learn that Neary is in love with a woman named Miss Dwyer, "who loved a Flight-Lieutenant Elliman, who loved a Miss Farren of Ringsakiddy, who loved a Father Fitt of Ballinclashet, who in all sincerity was bound to acknowledge a certain vocation for a Mrs. West of Passage, who loved Neary" who then develops a love for Miss Counihan, who loves Murphy (3). *Murphy* is almost tedious in this regard, but what makes it stand apart is the comedic result of the circulation of these desires. Having grown impatient at Miss Counihan's refusal of his amorous attention, Neary undertakes measures to track down Murphy so that he may advance his relationship with her. Sending a delegate to London, Neary doubles his effort by occupying himself with the same task, albeit by a different approach. Regardless of who succeeded first, Neary or Cooper, the delegate, the latter would act as an advanced liaison, or else a set of eyes to keep track of Murphy until Neary can rush to London with Miss Counihan to precipitate the encounter that would either initiate his courtship or else allow him to move on. The elaborate network of competing and unaligned desires is common fare to so many romance novels: plans laid out and thwarted, longing and unquenched passion, scandal and intrigue. Such elements become the raw material for countless volumes of pulp fiction.
But Murphy raises conflict with the staid assumption of how a marriage plot should end: happily in matrimony. Murphy's tactic is one of passive resistance, inasmuch as his passivity to respond to the myriad of desires foisted upon him amounts to an act of resistance in itself. The problem with this approach is that eventually Murphy's passivity allows him to become ensnared in the desires of others, and once resistance fails his only move is to take flight in the way he flees to London to escape the desires of Miss Counihan. Out of the frying pan and into the fire; once in London he meets Celia Kelly, an Irishwoman by birth who has fallen on hard times after the tragic death of her parents, whom Murphy falls in love with. The cycle begins anew, and ultimately his passivity allows Celia to move in with him, and then insist that he find employment, so they can afford to wed.

Murphy himself lacks ambition. Day after day he goes out, dressed in his best set of clothes with the supposed intent to look for work, but instead he loafs about. He only even leaves his flat because that is what Celia expects him to do, and in a sense Murphy's forays into the streets of London are as much an attempt to escape from Celia as they are the fulfillment of her expectations of him. It is only by accident that Murphy even secures a job. While out not looking for work one day Murphy runs into an old acquaintance one Austin Ticklepenny, who in fact corners Murphy and turns him into a captive audience for his lamentations. Ticklepenny relates to Murphy that he has found himself trapped working as a nurse at a convalescent home. Confessing that he is ready to quit after little over a week but bound to stay on for a month before he receives any pay, Ticklepenny he bemoans the fact that he cannot afford to move on to look for another job.
without first receiving that payment. Murphy takes an immediate interest in the position, and by the time they take leave of each other the two construct a plan to have Murphy become Ticklepenny's surrogate, taking his place so that he could get paid and leave before the month is up.

Murphy takes interest in the job for the most obscure of reasons: mainly "two hitherto distinct motifs" of "lunatic" and "custodian" from a report prepared for him by a fortune teller (53). At the same time the conditions of the job would allow him reprieve from Celia's constant presence, as well as the weight of her desires which she foists upon him. To take the job Murphy would have to live on site, at the outskirts of London, in the lodging provided by his new employer. Although these are not the initial stated conditions for Murphy's sudden interest in taking on the job, they do allow him to flee from Celia in similar fashion to the way he has already fled from Dublin and the amorous desires of Miss Counihan.

§ As a text of desire

Desire for Murphy is always the desire of an other foisted upon him -- a textbook example of the Lacanian catechism that desire is always the desire of the Other – and in response his way of dealing with these overbearing desires are perfectly neurotic. His avoidance of Miss Counihan's desire is clear in his flight from Dublin to London, but even in London he cannot escape the ensnarement of desire as Murphy becomes Celia's love object, or at least the object of her affection and a means to an end of her own desires. In addition to "her desire to make a man of Murphy!" which results in her
constant and insistent nagging that he find a job; at the same time Murphy's employment would allow Celia to stop working the streets, a fate she is bound to when her parents die tragically while she is still young (40).

Murphy’s responses to the imposition of these desires are perfectly neurotic inasmuch as there is a repetition: his flight to London to gain employment, ostensibly in order to be able to afford to come back and wed Miss Dwyer; or his subsequent flight from London to gain employment in accordance with Celia's wishes so that they can wed, and he can support her. Conflict arises in Murphy, the part of him "that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled [sic] up at the thought of her" (5). For Murphy, Miss Counihan and Celia are just links in the signifying chain; quilting points that inscribe him within the field of the Other as a subject of the signifier. Compelled to resist and oppose this signification, Murphy always knows that his death is the only thing that can free him from signification as this subject. Indeed, as his attempts to stop his heart from beating is quite literally a perfect instantiation of the death drive, manifest in Murphy's drive to dissolution of his subjectivity, rather than his ego.

Given Freud's elaboration that the object of the death drive is interchangeable, the subject of the signifier (ɔ) can just as likely become this object as any other. The aim, dissolution of the object, would still be virtually the same and even if this were not accomplished the drive would still be satisfied. Considering that an ego can become structurally coupled to a symbolic subjectivity (as the objet a in the fantasy), it could even then be understood how the undertaking of an act at the symbolic level might be done in hopes of having a similar effect in the imaginary register; that is, the aim could
even still be the dissolution of the ego by proxy if not by some happy accident -- the same way a drunken darts player may aim at 20s but miss and end up hitting a double bullseye, or a skilled marksman might compensate for the inaccuracy of its rifle to hit its target by of missing the object that it aims at. Even though, again, the object of the drive does not matter. For inasmuch as the object of the drive becomes the object-cause of desire, the objet a can become manifest as different objects and take up different meanings according to the register it becomes manifest in: real, symbolic or imaginary.

Murphy's own desire is tied more to Neary's ability to stop his heart "and keep it stopped, within reasonable limits, for as long as he liked", an ability that Murphy cannot quite grasp as whatever it was that Neary had "into Murphy's heart it would not enter." And yet Murphy persists in pursuit of this goal, or at least the attainment of a point between this zero state and the heights of irrational exuberance, having "such an irrational heart that no physician could get to the root of it." But while he fails to "blend the opposites" in the same way as Neary, during "irksome situations beyond endurance" as when he wants a drink or feels "the pangs of hopeless sexual inclination" he performs the ritual "because it gave him pleasure!" (2).

First it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind, as described in section six. And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word. (2)

But perhaps the correct would be jouissance, in which case it would be more apt to forget about Murphy's desire and focus on Murphy's drive.

In order to achieve this meditative state, to come alive in his mind, Murphy sits naked in a rocking chair, binding himself to it with seven scarves "Two fastened his shins
to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breasts and belly to the back, one his wrists to the struts behind" (1). Sitting this way Murphy rocks his chair back and forth he can "come alive in his mind," escape a world he found unbearable, and achieve a state of blissful respite, if only for a little while.

§ A "Matrix of surds." (68)

The structure of the novel alternates between London and Dublin: the former the site of Murphy and Celia's affairs, the latter focusing on Neary and his attempt to track down Murphy, all vectors to arrive in the same place in chapter 12. But in the middle of the text exists the aforementioned "section six" which briefly gives an account of Murphy's mind, which helps in understanding what drives Murphy.

Chapter 6 elaborates that Murphy feels himself “split into two, a body and a mind” and along these lines he distinguished between “actual” and “virtual” parts of his mind. Although his mind pictures itself as “a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without” the actual functions as the channel or part of his mind correlative to experiences “both mental and physical.” The former he equates with the form of a “kick” which originates either in his body or else in the perception of his mind, although its origin is somewhat irrelevant since it was essentially indistinguishable whether he “thought a kick because he felt one” or “felt a kick because he thought one.” (65-67). The actual served as his mind’s link to the “big world where Quid pro quo was cried” in the streets and market while the virtual he equated to the “little world” inside of his mind “where he could love himself” (4). The virtual is the realm of pure mental experience
where he felt the “supreme Caress” as he “lapsed in body … coming alive in his mind, set free to move among its treasures.” (66-67). Rather than stopping his heart like Neary, the entire point of Murphy’s ritual is to escape from the big world and ‘come alive’ in his mind. This transition is not merely metaphorical, a spatial element comes into play in the process of ‘falling’ into the deeper and darker layers of his mind, but even further the text is clear that Murphy literally considers his mind to function “not as in instrument but as a place” of refuge (107).

In Chapter 6 we receive a first glance of the “skullscape” that becomes an arena for the *Three Novels*, and other works. But Murphy’s mind is not simply a binary space, in fact it splits into three zones: the light, the half-light, and the dark, which Finney roughly equates to consciousness, the semi-conscious, and the unconscious. According to this order the actual is "above and bright" where the elements of physical experience “were available for a new arrangement”; reversed or else corrected as it is direction (67). The virtual is a zone of pleasant contemplation, of the half-light in a space beneath the actual. In the light there were “forms with parallel,” the “elements of a new manifold,” in the second there were “forms without parallel” and “states of peace.” But in the dark, there was a “flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms.” The dark was a zone of “neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming.” A zone of commotion and chaos where Murphy isn't free but rather "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom." Here Murphy feels "the sensation of being a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion" that place beyond bliss that is "so pleasant that
pleasant was not the word" (67-68). Here Murphy can experience the fulfillment of the drive in its purest state, free from the trappings of desire, and this is the place he escapes to in his chair, the only worldly possession that he even cares about.

When he first takes the job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (M.M.M.) he leaves the chair behind at the apartment he shares with Celia in West Brompton. Although he does not "come alive" in the way he is able to while performing his ritual he blames this on his body "fussy with its fatigue after so much duty," but still he is able "to do without the chair" (113). Coupled with the fatigue of work, the job itself affords Murphy an "appeasement by proxy." Murphy quickly proves his competency at the job, surpassing even the most experienced nurses who must coerce or restrain the patients when he is able to gently persuade them. He experiences a general feeling of comfort inside the wards and is “sorry when the time came to leave them" and while there are several aspects of the wards that Murphy enjoys the most satisfying aspect is the "vicarious autology" that he gets from observing the patients who inhabit their own little worlds (113).

Murphy’s fascination with the patients develops instantly, and even more than the pleasure he derives from his "vicarious autology" it is the reciprocal gaze of the patients that he finds the most gratifying. He attributes the success he has with them to the notion that they do not see him in the same way as the other nurses, but rather as one of their own. This becomes "the signpost at last on which the way he had followed so long and so blindly, ... It meant that they felt in him what they had been and he in them what he
would be" (110). After feeling so out of place for so long Murphy feels that "he had found his kindred at last" (108).

Still, thoughts of the chair return to his mind, "that aid to life in his mind from which he had never before been parted" (113). According to the schedule of the position he must work at night every other week, and as his second week approaches, he begins to dread the thought of having to spend time in the wards while everyone is asleep. At the first chance he gets Murphy returns to town in order to recover the chair, and upon returning to the M.M.M. he indulges in his ritual, except this time without tying himself to it with the scarves as usual. Despite this he is still able to enter a meditative state, and when he comes back from the "little world" Murphy is startled to find that he is not alone: Ticklepenny is there with him, watching.

Comparing Murphy to one of the patients who has been in a catatonic stupor for the past three weeks, Ticklepenny tells him that "you had a great look of Clarke there a minute ago" and this comparison elicits a moment of gratification in Murphy (115). He neglects to suppress his enjoyment in the way that he normally hides the pleasure he feels while in the wards, and this unbridled display of causes Ticklepenny to retreat in alarm. "You want to watch yourself" Ticklepenny warns him “You want to mind your health," but Murphy's only concern is rather "In what way?" his visage elicits the comparison to Clarke. In effect Ticklepenny’s observation makes Murphy’s night “perhaps the best since nights began so long ago to be bad,” in an era that supposedly predates the time captured in the novel (116).
§ The etymology of gas

When Murphy arrives at the M.M.M. there isn't a room available for him to stay in until Ticklepenny is released from his duty. Although arrangements are made for Murphy to serve as a replacement, the head nurse (Bim) refuses to pay Ticklepenny early. Instead, Bim prolongs the time Ticklepenny must stay on until the end of Murphy's first month, as a sort of guarantee against the latter's ability to fulfill the requirements of the job. Bim offers the two several solutions to the question of their co-lodging at the M.M.M., including the sharing of Ticklepenny’s room outright, but the two decide to set up a place for Murphy to sleep in the garret above Ticklepenny's room.

Murphy finds the space of the garret to his liking, except that it is unheated, and his protestations induce Ticklepenny to spend the better part of an afternoon working on a solution. First, he locates an unused gas radiator, then he hauls it up to the garret, the only problem is that there isn't a gas tap to hook it up to which necessitates the construction of a series of feed tubes from the garret to a disused gas tap in the w.c. on the level below. Ticklepenny has this entire contraption set up by the time Murphy returns from his first shift in the ward, the only problem is that he can't get the radiator to light. Murphy finds Ticklepenny fooling with the spark gun when he comes back to the garret and points out that he can't smell any gas. Ticklepenny is insistent that he turned it on, in the w.c. and descends to check it, and they remedy the situation without ever ascertaining how the tap, "which he really had turned on, came to be turned off" (105).

Ticklepenny's initial trouble with the gas tap is never explained, and while it inexplicably turns off, much later it mysteriously turns on. When Murphy first brings his
he is eager to perform his ritual, "having satisfied himself on the way up that no one was about, least of all in the w.c." He makes his way to the garret, bringing the chair with him and even though nobody else is around “almost at once gas, reminding him that he had forgotten to turn it on, began to pour through the radiator.” This too is never explained, and Murphy is content not to put any effort into trying to figure out how or why this happens. That the gas suddenly comes on does not alarm him, he is simply “greatly obliged, that he had not to let down the ladder” to go and turn on the gas (114).

From a purely Formalist perspective the gas becomes a functional unit, and these scenes plant the "element that will come to fruition later" (IMT 89). In his essay the "Structural Analysis of Narratives" Barthes alights on the structuralist assumption that the introduction of a revolver into a narrative predicates its eventual use, a standard premise for Formalists since Boris Tomachevski's *Theory of Literature* (1925). Otherwise known as “Chekhov’s Gun” the premise speaks to an economy within narrative whereby no element is wasted, and everything presented to the reader or audience by the text is significant, even if the gun is not used “the notation is reversed into a sign of indecision, etc.” (IMT 92) (for attribution to Chekhov see Bitsilli, Petr M. *Chekhov's Art: A Stylistic Analysis*. Ann Arbor, Mich: Ardis, 1983., also Donald Rayfield, *Anton Chekhov: A Life*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997, p. 203). But Barthes raises the questions: "Is everything in narrative functional? Does everything, down to the slightest detail, have meaning?" As he works through these questions, he proposes that "even were a detail to appear irretrievable insignificant, resistant to all functionality, it would nonetheless end
up with precisely the meaning of absurdity or uselessness: everything has meaning or nothing has" (89).

What of the gas then? What can we ascertain from these first two scenes in Murphy in conjunction with what happens in chapter 11 when the gas comes on unexpectedly while Murphy is tied to his chair? These first two instances set up expectations for the reader that influence their reception of what is to come: when a charred corpse appears chapter 12 it can be surmised that Murphy dies in a conflagration; at least, this is the standard reading of the novel which gives no reason to doubt the circumstances of his death. But at the same time these circumstances, as well as how the body is identified, are most peculiar. While the text insinuates that his death is an accident, we as readers must to piece together the exact circumstances of how this comes about, for his actual death is never narrated, never made present in the novel – after chapter 11 Murphy simply disappears.

Central to these circumstances is the question of how the gas turns off when Ticklepenny turns it on, and then how is it mysteriously turned on not once, but twice when nobody else is around. In the initial instance Murphy and Ticklepenny inspect the tap, and the text describes it being of a “double chain and ring” apparatus that was a common feature to gas lamps – the “tap” being a dismantled light fixture that predated the introduction of electric light to the building. Murphy jokes that “perhaps a little bird flew in” and perched on the contraption, thus turning it off, but the window is closed, and the text never returns to this matter in order to provide an explanation (105). What are we to make of this detail then? Is it absurd? Useless? The tap is ultimately the central
element to Murphy’s demise, if it never goes on at the end of chapter 11 then there is no explosion, no conflagration.

The garret itself is a rather simple space, "the ceiling and the outer wall were one, ... pitched at the perfect angle of furthest trajectory, pierced by a small frosted skylight, ideal for closing against the sun by day and opening by night to the stars." A trap door in the floor opens to Ticklepenny's room below, and in addition to the radiator and the rocking chair which are brought up into the space there is also a bed, another chair, a chest, and an "immense candle stuck to the floor by its own tallow" (98). Ostensibly this candle becomes the source of the conflagration that consumes Murphy's body, the gas becoming the fuel that the flame ignites, but just how this happens remains something of a mystery.

The explosion occurs early one morning, in the wee hours before the dawn when Murphy returns from his shift in an agitated mood. He ties himself to his chair and begins rocking and

At one of the rock's dead points he saw, for a second, the dip and the radiator, gleam and grin; at the other the skylight open to no stars. Slowly he felt better, astir in his mind, in the freedom of that light and dark that did not clash, nor alternate, nor fade nor lighten except to their communion. The rock got faster and faster, shorter and shorter, the gleam was gone, the grin was gone, the starlessness was gone, soon his body would be quiet. Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock to faster and faster and then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free.

The gas went on in the w.c., excellent gas, superfine chaos. Soon his body was quiet. (151)

Chapter 11 ends by indicating that the gas is turned on while Murphy tied to his chair, and since a charred body appears in chapter 12 we can easily put two and two together:
Murphy is tied to the chair, the gas comes on and fills the room until it reaches the floor, the burning wick ignites the room before Murphy has the chance to untie himself.

This scenario presents several problems, besides just the question of how the gas turns on in the first place. The dip of the candle is lit, but it is not clear if the "grin" of the radiator is the 'blush' of the asbestos or else a reflection of the candle light off the front of the radiator -- the text is not clear. If the grin indicates that the radiator is on then it must be turned off, and then on again, if the room is to fill with gas. But then, "the gleam was gone, the grin was gone," and from this it is uncertain whether this signals Murphy's entry in to the little world inside of his mind, making him oblivious to the outside world.

In the final sentences of chapter 11 there is a repetition, with sight variation, of the final lines of chapter 1, where it reads:

The rock got faster and faster, shorter and shorter, the iridescence was gone, the cry in the mew was gone, soon his body would be quiet. Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free. (6)

Of course, it is after this that Celia find him incapacitated on the floor, but the final lines of chapter 11 add to this and signal the introduction of the gas. Being at least able to sense things in the "big world" while in his state of disconnect the smell of the gas might rouse Murphy the way that Celia does when she enters the room; or Ticklepenny does after entering the room. All we know is that the gas comes on and that a charred corpse appears in chapter 12, we can assume that this is Murphy's body, but we are not able to say it is for certain.
Are we to take the absence of gleam and grin to mean that the candle had gone out, as sometimes happens when the wick burns low enough to become submerged in the wax? If the gleam was also gone this could indicate that the wick was out, having burned down so far that it fell into the wax. Indeed, the text indicates that the wick of the candle is already "sconced in its own grease" as it had already burned down to a puddle of wax earlier in the text (151). When Murphy awakes after his first night's sleep in the garret nothing remains of the candle "but a little coil of tallow (106). If the candle is actually extinguished then there is nothing to light the gas, in which case the room could still have filled with gas – provided that the skylight had also somehow become obstructed. But then further complications arise for this apparatus of execution to function: if the wick is out then there is nothing to light the gas, and the absence of a source of ignition, then Murphy would have died of asphyxiation. But if this were the case the smell might have been enough to rouse him from his meditative state.

The indication that the gas comes on can only signal its introduction into the room, but Murphy is able to tell "almost at once" when the gas mysteriously turns on the night that he brings his chair back to the M.M.M. (114). Although this happens before Murphy enters his trance his senses are not completely cut off from the big world around him when in such a state, since Ticklepenny's presence is enough to bring him back from his little world. Further when he suggests that Murphy was "fast asleep in the dark with your eyes wide open, like an owl" Murphy rejects this observation, maintaining that he "was not asleep" (115). Then there is the instance at the beginning of the book when the phone rouses him from his meditative state, and while the ringing of a phone a foot away
from his head would be louder than the hiss of gas emitting from the radiator, it is enough to establish that Murphy's "little world" is not impermeable. Murphy is also able to free himself to answer the phone before his landlady, and he has to be able to untie himself from his chair since he only ever performs the ritual in solitude, although there is the instance where Celia finds him passed out on the floor, inverted and with the rocking chair on top, but we can only assume that this is an isolated incident. The text is not clear.

Then there is the question of the skylight, perhaps the most crucial aspect of this scene. If it is open as the text indicates it is then any gas emitted from the unlit radiator would rise to fill the space near the apex of the garret until it reached the level of the skylight, at which point it would escape the room. The text does indicate that "the starlessness was gone," which may have only indicated that Murphy's perception had faded from the actual into the virtual as the gleam of the candle was also gone (151). If we read the text literally to mean that the skylight had been closed, then this would mean that someone would have had to close it. The gas may have been prone to turning on or off by itself, but there is never any mention of the skylight closing by itself earlier in the text.

Something is missing from this picture: in the final analysis things do not quite add up. We can choose to casually dismiss the information that doesn’t make sense as “absurd,” but this is only a lazy conclusion that arrests further analysis: saying a text is absurd only means that a lack of effort has been put forth in one’s attempt to understand it. In a sense the gas becomes a distraction, its repeated mention only draws away from the fact that the situation in the garret has changed: that the skylight is somehow closed.
The text suggests that Murphy dies in a conflagration, but whether this is the case cannot be determined one way or another – the text is not clear.

Perhaps we should take a brief pause and remind ourselves that it is just a story, to expect it to be realistic may be asking too much. The tap is faulty, the skylight blows shut but a gust of wind, Murphy disappears, who cares if he's dead or not? It doesn't change the story... or does it? In addition to Tomachevski, in “Structural Analysis” Barthes also mentions the work of Claude Bremond whose understanding of function extends from the work of Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp. In Bremond’s paper "La logique des possibles narratifs" (1966 tr. “The Logic of Narrative Possibilities 1980) he attempts to "draw a map of the logical possibilities of narrative" to the end of classifying "narrative based on structural characteristics as precise as those which help botanists and biologists to define the aims of their studies” (387). This is precisely the type of 'narrative science' that Barthes derides as “utopian” as he lays criticism to “commentators who accept the idea of a narrative structure” and are “unable to resign themselves to dissociating literary analysis from the example of the experimental sciences.” But if we can look for structuration without structure, we can also identify form without formalism; without having to embark on the impossible task that would require us to consider “each and every narrative” in pursuit of such an approach (IMT 81)

It is not that Formalist or structuralist approaches are completely useless, such approaches can still provide us with a set of tools to use in the service of literary analysis. But what is more intriguing than Bremond’s attempt to construct a comprehensive taxonomic system is the point that Barthes draws from his work, that "each narrative
moment" or function allows for "a set of different possible resolutions, the actualization of any one of which in turn produces a new set of alternatives" in the text (IMT fn 1 pp 82).

What is the etymology of gas? Murphy wonders, “Could it be the same word as chaos?” Murphy resolves that from this point "gas would be chaos, and chaos gas" and in this regard it takes on a multitude of uses “it could make you yawn, warm, laugh, cry, cease to suffer, live a little longer, die a little sooner. What could it not do?” (106). Hesiod’s *Theogony* depicts Chaos as an attempt to picture the beginning of everything. Not disorder, yet not quite order, chaos it is a space of valence, the “yawning gulf or gap where nothing is as yet” (Burnet *Early Greek Philosophy*, 7 referenced by Ackerly 154).

Verily, the state of chaos is ultimately a state of possibility; a space where the widest range of outcomes is possible. In this sense chaos opposes entropy and the reduction of possibility, chaos is valence and polysemy; and the introduction of gas constitutes an introduction of polysemy in the text.

Within the structure of the text the gas serves as a “catalyzer” to help advance the plot towards the conclusion of the novel, but it also serves what Barthes calls a “cardinal” function. Cardinal functions operate as “real hinge-points of the narrative,” they are consequential and refer to alternate developments of the story and either “inaugurate or conclude an uncertainty.” But while they bear such importance to the range of possibilities in the narrative Barthes notes that such functions “may appear extremely insignificant” at first glance much as the introduction of the heater into the garret may seem innocuous, even after the first time that the gas mysteriously turns on (IMT 94).
Even in this respect the gas is merely a catalyzer to the movement of the plot, but what is the function of the gas in Murphy's final scene? Does it make him cease to suffer and die a little sooner? Or perhaps cease to suffer and live a little longer?

The gas draws our attention to the seam in the text, inviting us to look closer and realize another possibility, and serves a function in that regard. The only question is whether we are willing to pay closer attention to the seemingly minor details which suddenly reorganize the narrative once we give them proper attention. “Any fool can turn the blind eye, but who knows what the ostrich sees in the sand?” (Murphy 106). As a cardinal function the gas becomes an aspect of the text that invites a closer look to examine the conditions of Murphy's disappearance. As the gas introduces chaos into the events of the novel it also introduces a degree of polysemy into the text itself, opening a space of possibility in the text, one that is waiting there to be realized. Neither absurd nor useless, the mystery of how the gas goes on and off draws our attention to a seam in the text, a place where two edges come together but the pattern doesn’t quite match up. If you tear at the seam, does the text rip apart? Does its unity vanish, or is there more material behind it? Something else hidden? Another possible configuration of the fabric of the text?

§ "A classical case of misadventure"

Murphy's demise is rather unremarkable, at least, this is the way his friends and acquaintances treat it in the novel. Remembered as "the male nurse that went mad with his colours nailed to the mast" it is very easy for Ticklepenny and the other nurses at the
M.M.M. to surmise that Murphy's death was, if not an unfortunate accident, then a suicide induced by his madness (148-49). While at first glance it seems obvious that the gas is responsible for Murphy's death, the closer we consider certain aspect of the text the more complex the scenario becomes. On one hand the text does not give us enough information about Murphy's final moments at the end of chapter 11, and we are left to guess that he dies the same way the characters in the novel can only assume that it is his charred corpse that turns up in the morgue. Ticklepenny’s comparison to Clarke is enough to introduce the possibility of a lapse in sanity and becomes expedient to such an explanation in hindsight, especially when coupled with what happens in the wards during Murphy’s last night. At the same time the exact conditions of his death are uncertain, and the text is ambiguous as to exactly how Murphy's meets his demise. While the solution is proffered, it is never narrated, and a sufficient account of Murphy's death is completely absent from the text.

Chapter 12 gives no indication of the state of the body upon its discovery: whether it is found tied to a chair, in a seated position, etc. The text merely presents a charred corpse, and when Neary questions if the death was accidental the coroner can only throw up his arms, unable to answer. Dr. Killiecrankie has to chime in for him that it was the result of "a classical case of misadventure" (158). We can surmise that his body is found with the chair and fasteners still intact and that the coroner and Dr. Killiecrankie are merely demurring the point that Murphy was found in such an odd and potentially embarrassing position, but the two become so encumbered with arguing whether it was the burns or the shock that was the ultimate cause of death that their modesty and
pointless bickering are symptomatic of their complete ignorance of the details (157). Further the text casts doubt upon the coroner’s competency describing him as being ensconced in golf, he pines to return to the links (156). To the point: they are not even sure that the body is Murphy's, which is why the group of Neary, Miss Counihan, Celia, etc. are even called to the morgue at the M.M.M. in the first place.

When the body is revealed its anterior is so charred that none of the group of friends, lovers, and acquaintances can make even the slightest gesture towards a positive identification. There is no facial feature, no recognizable detail to identify on the anterior of the corpse. The crowd simply stands there in silence, and in what seems to be a moment of exasperation Celia request to have the body turned over, and Hey! Presto! She recognizes the visage of a birthmark on his ass!

Human skin reddens even as a result of first-degree burns, and with second-degree burns the epidermis blisters, eventually turning dark brown and leathery. Second-degree burns also dry the skin and penetrate down to the dermis, and third-degree burns penetrate down to the fat layer -- which means that even in a best-case scenario it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to make any qualitative identification referent to any part of the skin in even the mildest of cases. A corpse burned to a point that would cause death and obscure any possibility of physical recognition is consistent with fourth-degree burns, in which case it would be highly unlikely that any part of such a body would remain unsinged. And when corpses are charred to such a degree “moles, scars and tattoo marks are usually destroyed” as the skin contorts and blackens (Rao). The chances
of being able to identify a birthmark on a charred corpse would be equivalent to looking for a rabbit in a snowstorm.

Depending on the severity and degree of the conflagration areas of covered skin might be spared, including the buttocks in sitting individuals, but if the fire was so great that the chair was also consumed then it would make no difference -- and there is no indication as to whether the chair survives the blaze or not. Although the chair and any ties that might have bound Murphy to it would most likely have been consumed by the fire; when presented for identification there is no mention as to his body being distorted or in any position besides a recumbent state.

The most reliable forensic method for identifying a charred corpse is to identify it using dental records, a practice for which the precedent had already been set by the fin de siècle. There is record of the practice of using dental records to identify bodies that had been otherwise charred beyond recognition dating back to as early as 1878, when it was used to identify victims of a fire in the Vienna Opera House. Another famous case in the field of forensic odontology occurs in 1897 when a fire in Paris' Bazar de la Charité claimed the lives of one hundred and twenty-six members of the aristocratic elite. Of that number, 30 individuals, including the Duchesse d’Alençon (daughter of the Duke of Bavaria, and sisters of Elisabeth, Empress of Austria and Anne, Queen of Naples), were charred beyond recognition, and all but five of which were identified by a comparative analysis of their dental records. Albert Haus, of the Paraguan Consul, was credited with suggesting the consultation of the dentists of the unidentified victims, and in 1898 Oscar Amodeo published “L’Art dentaire en Medecine Legale” which not only documents
efforts to identify the victims by their dental records, but which also becomes an important and foundational legal text to modern forensic odontology (Taylor).

This is all to say that, whether or not such dental records would be readily available, the practice of identifying a badly burned body using dental records had already been established, but such a solution is never proffered. There is the possibility that a proper set of dental records might not have been attainable in Murphy's instance, but this is all beside the point of elaborating the degree of incompetence displayed the coroner "who pounced on the find," along with Dr. Killiecrankie, once Celia claimed to recognize Murphy's naevus on the rump of the charred corpse (160).

Then there is the problem of the letter which somehow survives the blaze, virtually untouched except for the part where it would have been dated. Its discovery is all too convenient, and the directions it gives for the disposal of the remains in “the necessary house” of the Abbey Theater in Dublin “where the happiest hours have been spent, on the right as one goes down into the pit” where they are to be flushed “if possible during the performance of a piece, the whole to be executed without ceremony or show of grief” (161). In his volume *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy* (2004) Chris Ackerly notes how these instructions are “at odds with all we know of Murphy” and while he maintains the assumption that this stands in contrast with his decision to return to Celia, it becomes another wrinkle in the theory that Murphy’s death is accidental (207). First off, if this is a suicide note, as is assumed, then it would mean that Murphy would have had to untie himself and write it after the gas came on, since prior to this the text indicates that he was resolved to return to Celia after his rock. This means that once
the gas came on Murphy would have had to get up, turn it off (momentarily), write the letter, close the skylight, turn the gas back on, light the candle, and wait for his death. If this does happen, the text does not narrate it, and if it doesn’t then the very existence of the letter becomes another signifier that should make us question our assumptions about the text.

In his book *The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (1984) Rubin Rabinovitz advances the theory that Murphy is in fact murdered by Cooper, but Ackerly dismisses this explanation as impossible noting that “Cooper could not have known where Murphy was, nor the intimate details of his garret and heating arrangements” (Ackerly 207, see Rabinovitz 113-18). This leaves Ackerly to question if Ticklepenny was the one who “pulled the plug” on Murphy, and while he posits this as the only “rational” explanation he ultimately dismisses it as an absurd scenario (207). Not only is there any semblance of a motive for Ticklepenny to kill Murphy, the latter is in fact the former’s ticket out of the M.M.M. But then, the notion that Ticklepenny is responsible for Murphy’s death is not the only “rational” explanation.

And then the letter's insinuation that Murphy's happiest hours were spent in the necessary house of a theater in Dublin runs contrary to everything that we as readers have come to understand about him up to this point. But then, this already indicates that the letter itself is crafted for a specific audience: the acquaintances that Murphy surmises will turn up following his death. Miss Counihan groans, Neary simply gazes on at the sheet of paper "for some time after he had ceased to read it" (161). Putting it back into its envelope he hands the letter to Celia, who first makes moves to tear it but then crumples
it instead in her smoldering rage. We do not know if this is meant to be a barb aimed at
the heart of Miss Counihan, who may very well have been a party present to those
"happiest hours" it is certainly an insult leveled at Celia. While Murphy had no way of
knowing that Miss Counihan was in fact en route to London at the time of his death, he
could approximate that Celia might show up to his post mortem and for all intents and
purposes this letter is addressed to her and her alone.

This solution remains satisfyingly unsatisfying to everyone involved, at least,
anyone who's desires remained predicated upon Murphy. As for his former employers, it
merely provides convenient incentive not to look too deeply into the matter. The coroner
is out the door to head back to the links just as Celia crumples the letter in her hands, and
Killiecrankie is all too eager to reclaim the storage space being taken up by the body in
his refrigerators. Neary can pursue his amorous intents with Miss Counihan unabated,
and Celia the bittersweet confirmation that she had indeed lost Murphy. Open and shut,
the letter explains it all. Indeed, it serves a sufficient evidence for the local authorities to
consider his death an act of suicide, or else "a classical case of misadventure" as the
coroner puts it (158). The body itself is turned over to Cooper, who looks for a trash can
to throw it in but being unable to find one he is forced to take it with him into a saloon.
After several hours of drinking he pulls it from his pocket to throw it "angrily at a man
who had given him great offence" and in the ensuing scuffle the bag is ripped open and
"by closing time the body, mind, and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the
floor of the saloon; and before another dayspring greyened the earth had been swept away
with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit" (165).
§ Only Solitaire

If we are to piece together the conditions that lead to Murphy's demise, the text also gives us ample evidence to support a contradictory reading: that Murphy makes his escape from the network of desires that have become a sort of virtual prison for him and into the asylum of the M.M.M. It is just as plausible that Murphy faked his death and took and the place of one of the patients, quid pro quo, as he executes his "escape from a colossal fiasco" (107). Certainly, one could raise the objection that this hypothesis is nothing more than a speculative fiction, but it would be errant to apply such scrutiny to this hypothesis while at the same time overlooking the improbable manner by which the body is identified.

Murphy considers the patients' "exile" to the ward a "sanctuary" from the big world. He reasons that in the wards one has the "inestimable prerogative... to wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner, and comfort himself with the society of others in the same predicament" and simply put "the little world" that he escapes to in his mind is equated to this sanctuary (107). Murphy esteems the padded cells in the M.M.M. as a most perfect representation of this space, and the entire aim of Murphy's ritual with the rocking chair is to enter such a place in his mind (109). But he still must come back from this place, back to the “'mercantile gehenna’” where Quid pro quo was the order of the day (25). It is also noteworthy that just being in the wards makes him happy and "made it possible for him to do without the chair." Although he is unable to come alive in his mind the way he was able to while rocking in his chair working among the patients still affords him "appeasement by proxy" and it is the threat of having
to switch over to the night shift, when the patients would be asleep, that raises Murphy's anxiety and sends him back to West Brompton to recover the chair (113).

Crucial to Murphy's situation is the way in which Ticklepenny gazes at him and compares him to Clarke, as well as by the patients of the ward who regard him as one of their own -- at least, in Murphy's estimation. Already of the mind that the patients are more compliant with him (as opposed to the other nurses) since they recognize him as part of their community, Ticklepenny's comparison strengthens this conviction in Murphy's mind.

This hypothesis is tested one night when Murphy comes to Endon's cell. While making his rounds Murphy is surprised to see Mr. Endon, "an impeccable and brilliant figurine… wearing an expression of winsome fiat," immaculately festooned, radiating energy, gazing up at the judas, seated before a game of chess (144). Murphy is "gratified in no small measure" at the thought that "Mr. Endon had recognized the feel of his friend's eye upon him" having "made his preparations accordingly"(144). But the sad truth is

that while Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr. Endon was no more than chess. Murphy's eye? Say rather, the chessy eye. Mr. Endon had vibrated to the chessy eye upon him and made his preparations accordingly. (144)

Murphy and Mr. Endon begin to play chess with each other while he is on the day shift. "Murphy would set up the game, as soon as he came on in the morning, in a quiet corner of the wreck, make his move (for he always played white), go away, come back to Mr. Endon's reply, make his second move," and back and forth throughout the day the two would play their game (112).
During their night game Murphy begins the game by advancing his King’s Pawn two spaces, after which Mr. Endon begins to develop his Knights (and for some reason moves his King’s Rook back and forth one square) but after his first eight moves returns the black side of the board to its beginning state.

![Chess Diagram](image)

**Figure 5.1: Mr. Endon’s (black) first eight moves**
The purely procedural nature of Mr. Endon’s play is designated in the first note to the game

(a) Mr. Endon always played Black. If presented with White he would fade, without the least trace of annoyance, away into a light stupor. (146)

His style of play is purely automatic, the other person merely initiates the sequence that plays out following white’s first move. This is what Murphy does, or at least tries to do as his second move mirrors Mr. Endon’s first move, his third the other’s second, and so on until his fifth move when Murphy’s pawn, placed at e4 during his opening move, blocks the pattern.

Figure 5.2
Finally advancing his own King's Pawn with his ninth move, Mr. Endon then embarks on a series that begins to develop his back line only to return every piece back to their initial rank: but with his King now on the Queen's side and vice versa so that the Knights and Rooks are switched, as well as the Bishops with the central files [Fig 4.a]. Then Mr. Endon continues to launch a new series of moves that after his forty-first move returns his Knights, Rooks, and Bishops to their initial positions; and the king and queen to the central files albeit in reversed positions so that the king sits on the queen's file and vice versa [Fig. 4.b]. With his forty-second move he advances his King to e7, in front of his Queen, and the notation of the game comments that “the termination of this solitaire is very beautifully played by Mr. Endon” who with his 43rd move returns his queen to its starting position -- after which Murphy resigns the game and falls forward to rest his head and arms on the chess board (147).

Figure 5.3: Mr. Endon's (black) ninth and forty-first move

We can guess that with his forty-fourth move Mr. Endon would return his King to its starting position on e8, which would in fact be an illegal move since it would put his
king into check by Murphy's Queen. But it is clear from this game that Mr. Endon is not concerned with the rules, if he even knows the rules beyond the basic understanding of the movement of the pieces. Their games often go on for hours, even all day with neither player ever capturing a piece or putting the other into check. This "pleased Murphy as an expression of his kinship with Mr. Endon and made him if possible more chary of launching an attack" and their game in chapter 11 proceeds the same way, with neither player making a capture during this game (112). Although Murphy does advance his pieces in a manner that both threatens several of Mr. Endon's, and even leads his own King out onto the board to be put into check by Mr. Endon, the latter does not declare it "nor otherwise giving the slightest indication that he was alive to having attacked the King of his opponent" (147). Instead Mr. Endon is only concerned with completing successive cycles of symmetry, "in a way that seemed haphazard but was in fact determined by an amental pattern" (148). In this light Mr. Endon's deference to attack is less a sign of kinship than a condition of his game play. Even supposing he does understand the rules in full, his reluctance to capture any of Murphy's pieces is not due to any affection for Murphy -- to say nothing of recognition. Mr. Endon does not even see Murphy as anything but a function of chess, he is not playing against Murphy, he is playing a game of solitaire, according to his own set of rules.

Murphy's resignation is perhaps as perplexing as Mr. Endon's procession of play: his moves are irregular, chaotic even, or at least they appear to be, but once his cycles return the back-row pieces to their initial rank the logic of his movements are rendered clear. Even if Mr. Endon would not have returned his king to its starting position with his
forty-fourth move his pattern in this game is laid bare: he will simply begin to develop a new procession of moves in order to return every ranked piece back to their home row through successive iterations. Following his resignation Murphy drifts off into a state of bliss where his senses find themselves "at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but he positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing" (148). Negation is what Murphy craves, and negation is what he gets, just not in the way that he wishes or expects.

§ excellent gas, superfine chaos

Clearly Murphy is thrown into a state of mental duress following his final game with Mr. Endon, that he suffers some psychic wound or else experiences a psychotic break, and his inability to envision his father is significant in this regard. The foreclosure of the law(s) of the name(s) of the father is significant to psychosis, since it signals the abandonment of trying to locate one's self within the symbolic grid of desire, which is also an abandonment of the configurations of neurosis. Indeed, earlier in the text Murphy when he contemplates the "etymology of gas" he wonders


Not only a multitude of meanings, gas takes on an esoteric significance for Murphy, and specifically as a creative force as his invocation of the division of "the waters from the waters" is a reference to the creation story from Genesis 1:6 (Ackerly 154).
While the text is vague on certain points, such as the mystery of how the gas turns on and off, it also gives us an excess of information, albeit information that we may not understand or know what to do with. One piece is the Suk's report, which Murphy refers to as his "life warrant" and the other is the game of chess that he plays with Mr. Endon, the notion of which appears in chapter 11 (20). As he begins to rock in the garret for the last time a phrase from the report becomes a mantra joining in the rhythm of his rocking: "The square of Moon and Solar Orb afflicts the Hyleg. Herschel in Aquarius stops the water" (151). An astrological determination: a square is an "aspect" between two celestial bodies that results in "apparently irreconcilable desires which may lead to going around in circles, struggle leading to action, must learn to satisfy both urges or give one up" (Booth).

In this instance the competing and irreconcilable desires are Murphy's urge to return to Celia, which stands in opposition to his urge to escape her network of desire that he is ensnared in. The part of himself that he hated is put into conflict with the part of himself that he loved, and to return to her would be to let that hated part win. The configuration of a square puts the sun and the moon "in the worst possible position with regard to each other," the Hyleg in this instance does not refer to the actual configuration of these heavenly bodies but "denotes a place on the horoscope rather than a particular planet -- it is an astrological term meaning 'giver of life'" (Miss Pagan 219, qtd. in Kennedy 253-54). Sighle Kennedy elaborates that Murphy's breakdown "seems foretold" by the reading he gets earlier in the text (Kennedy 254). The stars are against him except for Herschel, or Uranus, which Kennedy notes "could serve as a strengthening influence"
or a "last gleam of hope" (254, 256). Miss Pagan draws parallel with the first chapter of
*Genesis*, "where the *dry* land is brought forth;" stopping the water in the moment of
creation (Kennedy fn. 25 p 256).

Murphy is already meditating on this point when the gas comes on, its
introduction may not spell out his demise but rather a moment of creation -- the moment
of his rebirth as someone else. The gas does not initiate his psychotic break that has
already happened, but it does signify the element of chaos that is at once both disruptive
and creative. It's introduction into the room can only underscore Murphy's earlier
meditation on the etymology of gas, which in fact may have been part of a forgotten
dream. The text reads that "in the morning nothing remained of the dream but a
postmonition of calamity" (106). Ackerly suggests that this acts as an "oblique warning,"
ostensibly regarding Murphy's eventual death, but this is an assessment made upon the
assumption that Murphy dies, and the lingering monition is only referent to the residue of
the dream that lingers into his waking state (155). Further, it is not even clear which
"calamity" the postmonition is referent to death, psychosis, or Celia. To be sure, the
preceding paragraph ends "Hell. Heaven. Helen. Celia." and in context it makes more
sense to consider the calamity of the dream content the Hell Murphy goes through with
Celia.

Leading up to their final exchange Celia is strangely distraught over the death of a
neighbor who she barely knew, and her behavior begins to annoy Murphy, "whose
presence she seems conscious only in fits and starts, and then with a kind of impersonal
rapture that he did not relish in the least" but at least with Celia he is still apprehended by
her inasmuch as he is still an object invested in her field of desire (84). Celia looks through him, or rather, "back off him" and tries not to understand Murphy in their final confrontation, when he informs her of his finding a job (84). Murphy's annihilation under his lover's gaze is devastating, it sends the whole network of desire crashing down.

To be unseen by the Other fills him with rage, and it is the moment of his Che vuoi? Incensed, Murphy flies into a tirade, finally he does what she asks but he receives no praise, no recognition. Her desires for him have already disrupted his life so much so that he has conceded to be remade a new man in the image she has cast for him, but without the support of her gaze that image fades, Murphy begins to fade. But at least his outburst is enough to reclaim her attention, Celia’s attention turns back to him and she expresses her fears that he is leaving her "for good and all" (86). Murphy calms her down by telling her that he won't leave unless he takes the chair, which he ultimately does, but whether or not this is already a conscious intention of his is undecidable and the text gives us nothing to go on to be able to say one way or another, the text does not give us enough to go on. Indeed, before his final rock he resolves to leave the M.M.M. and return to her, but this plan is arrested by the introduction of the gas into the garret.

It is clear that Murphy's reclamation of the chair is already a significant act that designates his flight from Celia and given all the previous angst caused by their relationship it seems unlikely that he would return to her. If so, what would be the difference if he headed back for Dublin? That he does not once consider this possibility is evidence enough to underscore the strength of Murphy's resolution, even during such a harrowing experience. He breaks with her; the reclamation of the chair underlines this
point. If he retreats to her at this point he might as well retreat all the way back to Ireland, something which never even crosses his mind. Murphy’s motion is always onward, despite the circumstances. He comes to this point as if by fate, like “a missile without provenance or target” Murphy’s direction is ever onward.

§

“the last at last seen of him himself unseen by him and of himself “

(150)

Murphy reawakens in the actual once he notices that Mr. Endon is gone, further evidence that he is still able to maintain an awareness of his surroundings even in absentia of the iteration of his conscious self (as present). Pulled back from the virtual Nothing, Murphy finds Mr. Endon down the hall pushing the indicator outside of the room of one of the other patients. Returning him to his cell, Murphy returns the chessmen to their box, tucks Mr. Endon into bed, and then kneels at the bedside. Taking Mr. Endon’s head into his hand, with his “lips nose and forehead almost touching Mr. Endon’s he looks into his eyes and sees "himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself" (150).

Murphy can gain a sense of "vicarious autology" through the patients of the ward, or so he thinks. Murphy can see something of himself in the patients and he assumes that this feeling is reciprocal, that they acquiesce to his ministrations because they don’t see him as a nurse, but rather as one of their own. He finds this extremely gratifying, enough so that he can do without the chair and even though he eventually recovers it from West
Brompton, at the M.M.M. he finds it less necessary than before. Indeed, when
Ticklepenny compares him to Clarke Murphy receives an extreme sense of satisfaction
not because “he had his chair again” but because of the comparison (116). But this sense
of vicarious autology is just a fantasy, the illusion of “seeing oneself seeing oneself” that
Lacan mentions when discussing the concept of the gaze in *Seminar XI* (74).

In the order of visual phenomenology Lacan considers “the essence of the relation
between appearance and being” and the constitution of the subject in the scopic field that
arises between the eye and the gaze (XI 94). In the field of visual space the constitution
of the subject is dependent upon “the eye of the seer” but even prior to this glance is “the
pre-existence of a gaze” which serves as the “lining” to this field. In our subjective
relation to the visual realm the gaze serves a regulatory function, but is itself difficult to
apprehend, it slips away or else presented “only in the form of a strange contingency” (XI
71-72). Nevertheless we are well aware of this pre-existent condition of a given-to-be-
seen, and "from the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it,
he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being” though which he
constitutes himself “in the illusion of the consciousness of seeing oneself see oneself, in
which the gaze is elided” (XI 83). This illusion is always representational, is always
situated at the level of desire, but the gaze functions on the level of the drive.

This distinction is elided in the specular fantasy of the scopic field, just in the way
that Murphy mistakes his recognition in the eyes of Mr. Endon. At first Murphy thinks
that Mr. Endon's gaze is one of a kindred acceptance, it is only through playing his last
game of chess that he comes to understand his error that what he mistook for acceptance
was actually his invisibility in the eyes of Mr. Endon. Instead of seeing him as a friend or even an other, Murphy is nothing to Mr. Endon except an extension of the chess board.

When Murphy kneels next to Mr. Endon’s bed he stares into his eyes “across a narrow gulf of air, the merest hand’s-breadth of air” (149). In this moment we are given the most perfect literary representation of the split between the eye and the gaze; between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon.

“The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy.” (150)

This statement repeats no less than four times. In Mr. Endon, Murphy sees someone who is completely within the confines of the place inside his head, but through Mr. Endon Murphy sees himself as unseen. “‘Mr. Murphy is a speck in Mr. Endon’s unseen’” like a mote in the dark of absolute freedom (150).

Being unseen by Mr. Endon has the most profound effect on Murphy. It catches him off guard. In his elaboration of the gaze Lacan discusses the concept as conceived by Sartre “in the dimension of the existence of others” as a surprise “in so far as it changes all the perspective, the lines of force, of my world. … In so far as I am under the gaze, Sartre writes, I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears” (84).

But under the glare of the gaze it is the subject that fades and disappears. Indeed, as following this final chess match Murphy fades off into the virtual and “began to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare postnatal treat, being the absence (to abuse a nice distinction) not of percipere but of percipi” – not the absence of perceiving but the absence of being perceived (147). This throws him into the state of the
Nothingness, “not the numb peace” of the suspension of his senses, but rather “the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing” with a capital ‘N’ (148). Murphy experiences a surplus of *jouissance* in this instant, in Mr. Endon’s cell, in the very heart of the big world correlative to the little world inside of his mind. *If the chair helped Murphy reach this place in the virtual, what if his body was able to take him there in the actual?* And after this point one must question if the chair can even be adequate anymore? How could it?

Lacan elaborates that “in the so-called waking state, there is an elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, *it also shows*” (XI 75). So what does it show Murphy? Murphy experiences a *tuché* with the real through the eyes of Mr. Endon which offers the opportunity to apprehend himself, as constituted in the grid of desire. Lacan compares the fantasy of seeing oneself seeing oneself with “that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness” (XI 74). Indeed as "consciousness, in its illusion of *seeing itself seeing itself*, finds its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze" (XI 82). Unlike with Celia, when Murphy is unseen in her glance and the grid of her desires comes crashing down, being unseen by Mr. Endon deals a narcissistic wound to Murphy’s sense of self, to his very consciousness.

Murphy leaves the ward feeling "incandescent" even though being unseen strikes a blow to his ego (150). He ventures out into the night and tears off his clothes, laying in a "tuft of soaking tuffets" he tries but fails to envision Celia, his mother, his father -- and the inability to envision his father is significant. While it was usual for him to fail to fail
to envision women and his mother included, "never before had he failed with his father"
(150). Murphy is unable to
get a picture in his mind of any creature he had ever met, animal or human. Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes lines, as though reeled upward off a spool level with his throat. It was his experience that this should be stopped, whenever possible, before the deeper coils were reached. (151)

Thrown into this state of descent Murphy runs towards the garret until he is out of breath, "then walking, then running again, and so on" until he gets there (151). Resolving to have a rock in his chair, he decides to leave and retreat to Celia after his rock, only his death prevents this -- according to one interpretation. On the other hand, he had already recovered his chair, had already left "for good and all" and while he exudes passivity he shows no aptitude for retreat.

Quite the opposite, as Murphy even presents an ultimatum to Celia when she threatens to leave him and resume working the streets, imploring her to stay, and confessing his love to her while protesting her desire to change him. Imploring her that by desiring him to change that she will lose him, he proclaims "'What have I now?' ... 'You, my body and my mind ... one of these will go'", and he reconsiders this warning to himself when he returns for his chair: "'You, my body, my mind . . . one must go" (25, 114). Although, for all intents and purposes, he leaves her when he leaves for the M.M.M. his signification of this act is delayed. Likewise, it takes him some time to process his tuché with the real following his final chess match with Mr. Endon. And even still he begins to re-enter the network of desire, turning away from his encounter with the real, when he resolves to return to Celia. But then the gas is turned on – excellent gas, superfine chaos – and then Murphy ceases to be Murphy: he becomes someone else.
§ Breaking in to the asylum

A narrow opportunity is afforded Murphy to "settle down in the M.M.M. for the rest of his natural" like the "few such fortunate cases, certified and uncertified," who were afforded "all the amenities of a mental hospital from peraldehyde to slosh, without any of its therapeutic vexations" -- if only he could realize his chance to escape the *Quid pro quo* of the external world by sneaking in to the asylum (98-99). Consider Murphy's constitution in a scopic field constructed by patients to whom he is invisible, and specifically Mr. Endon who fails to even see Murphy, having no desire for Murphy other than the desire to play chess. This is devastating, but not exactly in the same way as Celia’s erasure of him, and in fact it is through the gaze of Mr. Endon that Murphy is able to see his way out of the predicament in which he finds himself.

Take Mr. Endon's unseeing of Murphy and situate it in context with the negligent gaze of the nurses who often fail to carry out their most basic duties. For instance, on the night shift it is Murphy's job to make a round through the ward every twenty minutes, but to do this he simply has to open the Judas shutter that in every cell door, switch on the light and then press the indicator button connected to a machine in the head nurse’s quarters that registered every visit. But the text notes that "many were the visits recorded... and never paid, by nurses who were tired or indolent or sensitive or fed up or malicious or behind time or unwilling to shatter a patient's repose" (142). The job is merely a functional position, paying attention is not even a requisite of the job and is in fact discouraged by Bim, the head nurse at the M.M.M., who instructs Murphy during his
orientation that he is "not paid to take an interest in the patients, but to fetch for them, carry for them, and clean up after them" (97).

It would be a daring attempt, if only for the fact that he would almost certainly run the risk of someone recognizing him -- or would he? Although he could easily avoid detection at night, during the day he would have to interact with the nurses which would put him at risk of discovery. Among those likely to notice him there is Bom, Bim and Ticklepenny, who is already aching to leave as soon as he had presented Murphy as his replacement. Although he does stay on, Ticklepenny begs Bim to reassign him to "the slops... do not send me back to the wards" a plea that Bim heeds (162). While Murphy could not have known this in advance, he could have bet on the possibility of Ticklepenny cutting his losses upon his disappearance, and in the worst-case scenario he would only have to wait a few weeks before Ticklepenny was gone anyway. Bim directs his attention to oversight of the entire facility, his role is almost purely administrative, and Bom delegates patient care to the lesser nurses like Murphy.

Whoever gets hired to replace Murphy would simply accept his presence as natural without question, which only leaves any of the other nurses who already worked there. And if he was recognized by one of the other nurses it would not matter, already being discouraged to take any interest in the patients, as Bim instructs Murphy during his orientation to the wards the nurses “had not competence to register facts" on their own; that privilege being left only to the doctors -- the doctors who rarely ever visit the patients (96). If the doctors rarely visit, and if their opinion was the only one that mattered within the entire facility, they would be the only people that Murphy would even have to fool.
Tricking the patients is already a foregone conclusion considering that Mr. Endon does not even register his existence as anything more than a means to chess. What Murphy mistakes for the sign of kinship might as well mean that his very existence was to be invisible to the patients of the ward, the same way they are already proscribed as invisible to the nurses by virtue of Bim's direction of the institution writ large.

Barring the circumstances of his detection, the only difficulties would be in persuading one of the patients to follow him up to the garret and take his place, and then deciding which patient to trade places with. On the former point, gaining the cooperation of the patients is something that Murphy has already demonstrated an aptitude for. One patient refuses to exercise "unless accompanied by Murphy" another refuses to get out of bed "unless on Murphy's invitation" and another requires force-feeding except for when "Murphy held the spoon" for him (109-10). As to the second point: if Murphy is not able to rouse Clarke from his catatonic stupor then perhaps there is another that he could impersonate until his presence becomes taken for granted. But someone like Clarke would be an optimal candidate. Although "the patients were encouraged to play billiards, darts, ping-pong," etc. many of them "preferred simply to hang about doing nothing."

Further, not every patient engaged in such activities, as there were also the "bedridden and more refractory cases" who are kept together in their own section of the facility (101). This section of the ward sits at a different end of the building, and includes the padded cells that Murphy considered to be "indoor bowers of bliss" that he equates to the little world inside of his mind (109). Given these conditions Murphy could easily slink
away and take the place of one of the more "refractory cases" until he became part of the scenery. Murphy could just disappear, in plain sight.

§

This conclusion is fantastic. Improbable yes, but not impossible. If his death seems unremarkable then that means that Murphy's gamble was a success. Although Murphy's demise seems to be a condition of happenstance everything presented to the reader, and the group that gathers in the morgue, belies a logic that is unmistakable once it is considered from the perspective that Murphy doesn't die, but merely substitutes his body with another the same way that Mr. Endon alternates his ranked pieces during their final game. Any skepticism on the part of the reader only serves to underscore the sheer brilliance of such a plan -- nobody would suspect that anyone would want to break in to an asylum. With nobody to miss him Murphy could live out the rest of his natural among the veritable bowers of bliss that he found among the wards of the M.M.M. At last his body could be quiet. At last he could be free.

There are several contingent factors that help Murphy out. In addition to the immediate end of Ticklepenny’s time in the wards following Murphy’s death, his approximation of Murphy to Clarke also helps to solidify Bom’s conclusion that Murphy simply loses his mind. Mr. Endon’s depressions of the indicator outside of the hypomaniac’s cell. This is something that normally happens at "regular intervals of ten minutes" and this pattern is interrupted once Murphy drifts off into the virtual Nothingness in Mr. Endon's cell. Not a visit is registered for the better part of an hour
while Murphy dozes, and then when Mr. Endon escapes he pushes the button six times within the space of a minute. This "unprecedented distribution of visits had a lasting effect on Bom" and continued to baffle him to "the day of his death" and to this point he simply deduces that "Murphy had gone mad" (148).

What is intriguing to this statement is that it appears as a metalepsis before the end of chapter 11. This sets up two things: the first is that the text is set up in a way that leads you back to a rereading in order to fully understand it. We can assume that this metaleptic insertion foreshadows Murphy’s death given the presence of a body in chapter 12, but at this point in the text we are still not sure that Murphy is going to die. Of course, the obvious significance of this statement can be read retroactively to understand that “Murphy had gone mad” and killed himself, but here the text merely indicates his department suffering a in insult or discredit. But what if someone discovers Murphy before the body is presented to Celia, Neary, and company in the morgue?

The elegance of the plan to break in to the asylum is that even if someone recognizes him, he is already where he would likely end up anyway: locked away in an asylum. Ticklepenny’s fear of going mad is clearly expressed in the text, and he is ultimately disturbed upon leaven Murphy when he makes the comparison to Clarke (58). We can only assume that this his fear of going mad was the general reason why he would not want to return to the wards, but it would be even more chilling had Ticklepenny’s aversion been to the fact that Murphy had already been detected in the ward. This also puts Dr. Killiecrankie’s behavior into a slightly different light, as the embarrassment of
losing a patient would be more damning than losing a newly hired nurse. Indeed, this would explain his nervous alacrity to be rid of the body.

The more one considers this alternate ending the more satisfying it becomes. The most alarming, the most radical meaning often disguises itself within the coordinates of such a banal reality, and this is the truly terrifying aspect of the real: it is always there, even in the missed encounter. The most devastating aspect of the tuché is that it is so obvious in hindsight, once sublimation occurs. The most striking blow is dealt to the ego of rational consciousness that is unable to see that which is plainly there, right under its very gaze.

§ The eye of the reader, the gaze of the text

In his book Introduction à la littérature fantastique (1970, published in English as The Fantastic 1973) Tzvetan Todorov writes "the fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader -- a reader who identifies with the chief character -- as to the nature of an uncanny event" (157). Essentially, at such a point the reader is left to make a decision as to what happens in the text, as he elaborates that "This hesitation may be resolved so that the event is acknowledged as reality, or so that the event is identified as the fruit of imagination or the result of an illusion; in other words, we may decide that the event is or is not. (Fantastic 157). The point relative to identification can be set aside for the moment, as functionally Murphy brings us to a similar dilemma, namely the question of whether Murphy is dead or whether he has disappeared.
The possibility of Murphy's disappearance is never mentioned in *Murphy*, but it is evoked in *Mercier et Camier* when Watt suddenly appears in the final chapter. Indeed, Watt is also mentioned in *Murphy*, and along with Mercier and Camier become part of the same group or series mentioned in the texts of the trilogy (*Murphy* 48). Addressing Watt, Mercier declares "I knew a poor man named Murphy ... who had the look of you, only less battered of course. But he died ten years ago, in rather mysterious circumstances. They never found the body, can you imagine" (*Mercier and Camier* 87). But we don't even need Mercier to recognize the mysterious circumstances surrounding Murphy's disappearance.

Although there is no magic or supernatural event in *Murphy* the way there is in the genre of the fantastic, Todorov identifies that in the 20th century a psychoanalytic literature replaces the genre of the fantastic. Following Freud's discovery of the unconscious the fantastic is made useless, as there is no need "to resort to the devil in order to speak of an excessive sexual desire, and none to resort to vampires in order to designate the attraction exerted by corpses: psychoanalysis, and the literature which is directly or indirectly inspired by it, deal with these matters in undisguised terms. The themes of fantastic literature have become, literally, the very themes of the psychological investigations of the last fifty years" and *Murphy* certainly falls within that category (*Fantastic* 160-61). Although the process identification with the protagonist becomes contingent: on one hand unnecessary, and on the other at least approachable inasmuch as the text nevertheless provides the reader access to the skullscape inside of Murphy's mind.
Todorov finds the possibility for polysemy in texts which utilize doubling, or else suggest an element of the *unheimlich* such as a *Der Doppelgänger* (*Fantastic* 143). The function of hesitation opens this space of possibility, where the reader must choose between what *is or is not* according to the information given in the text, and where a multiplicity of determinations can be considered simultaneously possible. He writes that "the fantastic requires a certain type of reading -- otherwise, we risk finding ourselves in either allegory or poetry" a type of reading that is situated between taking the text too figuratively or to literally (*Fantastic* 157). This does not preclude the possibility of such interpretations, but rather the more salient point to draw out is that genre has more to do with the practice of interpretation of the text than the text itself. What is a genre but a type or kind? We are always quick to attribute this quality to the text, but do we ever consider the possibility that, at least with some texts, genre is more relevant to the practice of interpretation than the text itself?

Genres do exist: the folk tale and the romance novel, and we can't just say that any text belongs to just any genre, there are limits to what can be said about even the most ideal writerly text. But how many readerly texts are there that don't fit neatly into one genre? How many cross genres? How often does a text cross over between genres, contain elements of other genres, or else about a similar genre? Indeed, in his exploration of the fantastic Todorov locates it between the uncanny and the marvelous, and even identifies transitory sub-genres of the fantastic-uncanny and the fantastic-marvelous on the cusp of each side (*Fantastic* 44). The concept of genre itself is a relevant to a structuralist endeavor to taxonomize literature, as if somehow the act of categorization
could stand in for a close reading and analysis of the text itself according to its own terms. We may be able to speak of genre, but we should question whether doing so can help us understand any given text. After all, the novel itself is a literary genre, and one so diverse that it contains a myriad of sub-genres and formally defies any attempt to define it. Genre is a degraded concept, or at least it should be considered a lesser criterion that caters more to the marketing of a product than to the text itself.

How we approach a text can condition how we interpret a text, this is certainly a concept that Beckett’s theatrical and literary bodies of work explore, and then there are certainly ways in which the text approaches the reader. While later novels like *Molloy* become more explicit in the way they challenge the formal limits of the novelistic genre, even earlier works like *Murphy* anticipate the reader, casting them into a virtual space in relation to the text. Nabokov is not the only author who plays chess with his readers, and while *Molloy* throws down a more aggressive syntactical assault from the second page, *Murphy*’s attacks the reader in a subtler manner, but both do so by way of manipulating the blind spot that opens between the reader and the text.

Between the reader and the text we have an iteration of the split between the eye and the gaze. The eye of the reader, the gaze of the text: when you look at the text, it also looks back at you. This is a quality of all texts; all narratives already presuppose an audience for their reception. From stage to print to theater; every play, every novel, every film anticipates an audience. But not every text launches an attack on the reader by the text in a way that both *Murphy* and *Molloy* do. Specifically, both novels exploit the blind spot the text creates for the reader, manipulating it in a way that frustrates the reader or
else renders the text opaque as does Watt – with its gaps and question marks, and the Addenda of fragments which may or may not belong in those gaps.

Unlike Murphy or Watt, Molloy does not simply anticipate the reader, it selects its reader. Molloy presents several challenges to the reader, with the most immediate being the second paragraph, which consists of the bulk of the first half of the novel. The syntax of the novel is such that Molloy is a text that almost discourages its reading, or at the very least ensures that the casual, consumptive reader will give up by the time Molloy finds himself in the police station. Besides, the story is told in the first few sentences: Molloy is at his mother’s house, he doesn’t know how he got there, why go on? Yet for some the quest to get there, becomes a MacGuffin to chase down across the ever-changing landscape of the second paragraph. The desire to understand who Molloy is and how he gets where he ends up can be enough to inspire the reader to press on through the dense syntax of the text in a similar way that Molloy works through the dense underbrush of the forest.

Nabokov is not the only author who plays chess with his reader. Ever meticulous in his stage direction, in his fiction Beckett asks as much of his reader as he does of his actors, treating each as a marionette or else a part of the scenery. Like the positioning of hands in Come and Go or the suspension of the actress in a fixed position above the stage in Not I (1972), Beckett’s fictions direct the reader into a specific position. Like a trompe l’œil or the anamorphosis in Hans Holbein's painting The Ambassadors (1533) which reveals itself as a skull when viewed from a certain perspective, Beckett’s fictions present a lure to the reader to solicit a look by getting the reader to approach a text from a
specific position, and with a specific set of desires. In this way these texts exploit these desires.