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SAMUEL BECKETT AND WILLIAM FAULKNER: THE RETREAT INTO MAGIC

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Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine the way in which two authors, William Faulkner and Samuel Beckett, view the traditional function of language in specific works. To some extent in each, words appear to explain, but fail to do so meaningfully. Rather, language is revered for its power as a felt physical force and for its ability to explain away or to exorcise. I shall begin by briefly discussing Beckett's Waiting for Godot, a play in which the four characters are alone on stage with nothing to do. They are left to their imaginative resources for diversion and order and so develop a kind of primitive dependence on word games, stories, and wishes reminiscent of early civilized man. Waiting for Godot serves mainly as a reference point with which to illustrate the principles of Cassirer, Roheim, and others which I discuss next. The anthropology and epistemology of this group provide useful theories of the origin of rudimentary linguistic forms and their application as magic. Next, we will turn to William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and examine the relationship of Quentin Compson to his own speech, a project
which requires consideration of his attitudes, history and surroundings. Hopefully, the parallel between Quentin's responses and those of primitive men in analogous situations will emerge in this analysis. Finally, in Watt, by Samuel Beckett, we will find a specific portrait of a man's language wrestling control of itself away from the speaker, a process about which Watt, the protagonist, is but dimly aware.

So the value of language as a symbol for "experience" or "meaning" is seriously questioned in these novels. Instead, Beckett, and to some extent Faulkner find language to be a maker of its own laws, and they reject its traditional mimetic function.
A carrot decomposes, a rope breaks, one tree acquires one leaf, the boss loses his sight, the slave his speech while two hats, one pair of boots, one pair of falling down trousers, a broken rope-belt, a turnip, and a radish prop the players' slow motion. No-time, nothing, no memory attack Didi and Gogo so cheerfully that we can laugh at Beckett's empty stage space.

Waiting for Godot was not an immediate smash hit, but "the fact that the inmates of a California penitentiary were able to respond profoundly to Godot is enough to show that the average first nighter is not necessarily a good judge of drama." Pozzo, Lucky, Vladimir, and Estragon are prisoners of a sort who continue to believe in their eventual release, but who are always disappointed. As with many inmates, they must pass the time and they are not sure why they are where they are, so it is not surprising that they invent stories and games for their pleasure. But Vladimir says sadly that their efforts are really fruitless; things only "seem reasonable until they become

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a habit . . . for habit is a great deadener." (58)
Beckett suggests in a thousand ways that we are all locked into the monotony of question and answer and story telling, but, that despite all the evidence, we are literally deadened by habit into a magical belief in our own linguistic resources. To emphasize the seriousness of this cultural blunder, Beckett carefully avoids catering to any of our expectations in Waiting for Godot.

Moral and physical landscapes are identical for Samuel Beckett so that his sets and stage directions are important to an understanding of his work. I have already listed all the events that occur on stage. The sparseness of action is matched by the nondescript setting: "A country road. A tree. Evening." Gogo and Didi are waiting and waiting; no distraction soothes their boredom. All traditional dramatic trappings are shorn away so that Beckett can sit back and see what men will do after a thoroughgoing reduction. Alain Robbe-Grillet concludes that at least one of the things we do when we are left to only our own resources is to elude or minimize the situation. "It is as if the real importance of any question were to be measured by our inability to apply our minds to

Page references will be cited parenthetically in the text of this paper.
it squarely, except to scale it down." Vladimir and Estragon do not consider the possibility that Godot will not come despite his repeated failure to appear for it is their custom to believe in Godot. It is much easier for the audience to wonder at their faith because the spectator's milieu is normally fraught with guidelines and codes (however valid) for dealing with experience. With neither moral norm nor deviation to order the stage universe, Beckett's characters may evade dread, agony, death, or they can collide with their fate head on.

Another significant way in which Beckett has disrupted the signals with which we normally measure our experience is a chaotic time scheme. Vladimir has memories of the Bible, grape picking, etc.) which intrude into his conversation. Estragon, however, cannot remember anything—he forgets Pozzo's visit by the second act. Pozzo himself does not "remember having met anyone yesterday." Didi's past-present and Gogo's eternal present are juxtaposed against an endless approach to eternity represented by the

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wait for Godot. Gogo and Didi's time moves slowly, doggedly, although the tree on stage produces a leaf overnight and Pozzo loses his sight and Lucky his speech between acts. With time speeding up and halting simultaneously, nothing fits into memory or into the future. Pozzo shrieks at Didi who asks "when":

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? . . . They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (5?)

The total indifference of time must be accepted for there is only an "instant;" any other aspirations can only torment. Pozzo has summed up a timeless problem and the only solution possible in one speech. Yet all the characters continue their search for a time scheme which never manifests itself. Accustomed to accepting the common notion that time is neatly divisible into years, months, and days, the audience's preconceptions may be seriously jolted.

Furthermore, in this vacuum, normally separate characteristics are yoked together as differing qualities of the

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5 Ross Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship" in Critical Essays, p. 162.
same entity. Past-present-future distinctions melt away; dreams and wakefulness, truth and illusion can no longer be separated. But this is not a stimulating chaos; instead, monotony drives our four speakers to psychic invention. Gogo and Didi bide their time; they are passive, indolent, and discover meaning where none exists. The medium of their discovery is language; stories are their "false memory." Capable of the mere beginnings of impulses, moods, impressions and desires, "everything that arises in them sinks back to oblivion before it gets anywhere." They can only play at the feelings and activities of which they speak.

Vladimir: What do we do now?
Estragon: Wait.
Estragon: What about hanging ourselves? (12)

Or: (Vladimir takes off his hat, peers inside it . . . Estragon with a supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his boot) (8)

Or, says Estragon, "Don't let's do anything, it's safer." (12)

In act II, they play at Pozzo and Lucky. Later, their affinity with the exaggerated gestures of clowns is made specific when Gogo and Didi decide that their "charming

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7 Eva Hetman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," in Essays, pp. 120-121.
evening" is apparently not over and is worse than a "pantomime, a circus, a music hall." Indeed, the two can speak in sing-song rhythm with each other:

V: We could do our exercises.
E: Our movements.
V: Our elevations.
E: Our relaxations.
V: Our elongations.
E: Our relaxations.
V: To warm us up.
E: To calm us down.
V: Off we go. (Vladimir hops from one foot to the other. Estragon imitates him." (49)

Story telling is a specific past-time because there is nothing to be done. The two thieves tale is analyzed but with nothing ("the essential doesn't change," says Vladimir) to measure, nothing to relate, and nothing to do, language is necessarily restricted to the most elementary of word games. Says Vladimir: "One [of the thieves] was supposed to have been saved and the other . . . (he searches for the contrary of saved) . . . damned."

Our heroes are incapable of keeping silent, admittedly so they will not think. Voices make noise "like wings, like leaves, like sand, like leaves; they all speak at once . . . they whisper, they rustle, they murmur, they rustle, they make noise like feathers, leaves, ashes, leaves." (40) All the permutations of the voice haunt the
characters. The voice is their mode of being—it brings texture to the homogeneous environment. Says Estragon, "We always find something, eh, Didi, to give us the impression we exist," to which Vladimir replies impatiently, "Yes, yes, we're magicians." (44)

Estragon cries, "let's make a little conversation." (32) Names are interchanged like hats. Is it a willow? ... a bush? ... a shrub? ... Is it Friday? Saturday? or Monday? ... Is it Godin ... Godot ... Godet?" Spending their evenings "blathering about nothing in particular" (42) they distend their vocabulary to its limit by making eager plans to contradict each other, to ask each other questions, to abuse each other. Vladimir and Estragon can even share a sentence, their most important possession.

Vladimir: He can't bear it.

Estragon: Any longer. (23)

In the void, where they must assert in order to continue, they assume the sorcerer's prerogative of assigning random power to accant.

Vladimir: Say you are, even if it's not true.

Estragon: What am I to say?

Vladimir: Say, I am happy ... 

We are happy. (39)

And throughout the play, they plan to leave, but instead
revert to the formulaic: "We can't; we're waiting for Godot." Or, they say, "let's go", but do not move. We are teased further with a graphic example of the power that magicians and relics have over each other; Lucky's voice is switched on by his hat. Without it he is silent.

If what the audience might reasonably expect to occur on stage is purposely avoided in Waiting for Godot, then we may well ask which aspect of existence Beckett seeks to illuminate. It is my contention that one thing Beckett subverts in the play and more specifically in Watt is the traditional mimetic function of language. Comic disorder and confusion is repeatedly tempered by the serious tone of his characters' fantasy and by their faith in language. Accordingly, it is valuable to refer back to primitive man and examine the nature of his environment and state of mind just as we have done with Vladimir and Extragon. We can then compare the two and trace a development from the savage mind to the disintegration of civilization's chief ordering principle—tradition—as exposed by William Faulkner for in the face of his dying code of honor, Quentin Compson finds solace in imagined solutions and in the soothing power of the word. But in Watt Beckett systematically destroys the power of language to explain or exorcise and we learn that language should claim to be little
more than the simple utterance of Vladimir and Extron.

The question of the origin of language has troubled epistemology for decades, and it is a problem which can never be solved with certainty. Supposedly, there might once have been an age when knowledge and its symbols existed in a perfect one-to-one relation. Now, our symbols are often discussed in terms of what they fail to do for us. William Faulkner, for example, conceived an extreme distrust of words as adequate symbols for heartfelt experience.

Ernst Cassirer regards this dilemma as an essentially naive one, for if the essence of an object or occurrence is seen as an unequivocal given, then anything which lacks that sort of solidity is mere fraud and illusion... this image... does indeed reflect a reality—but a reality to which it can never measure up and which it can never adequately portray. From this point of view, all artistic creation becomes a mere imitation which must always fall short of the original... it seems that all other processes of mental gestation [idealization, art, myth, theoretical knowledge which must frame reality in concepts] involve the same sort of outrageous distortion.

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Symbols are inevitably mediators, so any alleged truth content of language dissolves. Denotation by the spoken word is only the faintest suggestion of actual experience, so that it is likely to obscure rather than reveal truth.

Cassirer advises us to cease measuring the meaning of intellectual forms "by something extraneous which is supposed to be reproduced in them" and instead to see our symbolic modes as original forces and means of expression which posit their own spontaneous laws. They are not mimetic, but rather "organs of reality" since they are our only means of visualizing and apprehending anything.

Cassirer insists that comparing object or experience on which primitive symbols such as language and myth are supposedly based with our own empirical knowledge leads nowhere; rather, it is the particular perspective exposed in symbols which is most revealing. He makes a distinction between so called "original" or "mythic" modes of perception and a subsequent discursive mode. It is this distinction which I wish to use as a key to an analysis of Faulkner and Beckett.

In discursive thought, the particular phenomenon is related to the whole pattern

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10 Cassirer, p. 7.

11 Cassirer, p. 8.

12 Cassirer, p. 11.
of being and process with ever tightening, ever more elaborate bonds. In mythic conception, however, things are not taken for what they mean indirectly but for their immediate appearance, they are taken as pure presentations and embodied in the imagination.\textsuperscript{13}

The impulse for the mythic consciousness is towards concentration, the focusing of the immediate intuition to a single point. A man of such consciousness is not concerned with going backwards or forwards in time, but rather with the moment at hand; for him, the object of a word lies within itself, not in its relation to other things. The line between truth and appearance, the permanent and the transitory, past and present, waking and dreaming is thus nebulous. Light and dark, for example, are grasped as one complex whole before they emerge as separate characters. This is a period of spontaneous ideation and precedes the growth of logical categories.

For example, in \textit{Waiting for Godot}, we can recall that no one has a clear sense of time—Pozzo and Estragon are notoriously forgetful; both Vladimir and Estragon wait indefinitely for Godot. Past-present-future are not differentiated nor can the truth of any of their conjectures

\textsuperscript{13} Cassirer, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{14} Cassirer, p. 57.
be tested. When Vladimir asks Estragon if he ever read
the Bible, he replies, "The Bible . . . (he reflects) I
must have taken a look at it." (8)

In his theory of the development of language, Cassirer
says the next stage is the empiric or discursive mode,
where time and truth are more distinctly defined. A
determinate objective validity is only granted when it can
be confirmed by the continual test of experience. This mode
emphasizes synthesis, cause and effect, the relation of the
particular to the whole. Objects and experiences can be
named.

For Cassirer, the primary talent of the human mind
is imagination as exemplified by his definition of a mythic
consciousness. The evolution from the mythic perception
into its objectivization as a name or symbol is illustrated
by the momentary deity. This is simply a fleeting mental
image arising from any impression, wish, or danger affecting
primitive man. An object or feeling which commands the
undivided interest—even momentarily—of a primitive
affects him religiously and may be exalted to a divine
status.

Just let spontaneous feeling invest the
object before him, or his own personal
condition or some display or power that
surprises him, with an air of holiness,
and the momentary god has been experienced and created.\textsuperscript{15}

When a man begins to assert his will over this barrage of impressions and thus to order events to suit his own needs, relationships between action and effect are made and named. Man can realize his activity, as he formerly realized his passivity, by projecting it into the outer world.

An exalted feeling or momentary god is labeled according to the activity with which it is associated; the specificity of certain gods to certain needs is thus explained.\textsuperscript{16} If the death of a loved one is accompanied by intense feelings of awe and sorrow, these emotions will always be evoked by death symbols.

Indeed, we may find herein a theory of the origin of word-magic.

The notion that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relation to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually is the essence of the object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name—that is one of the fundamental assumptions of the myth-making consciousness itself.\textsuperscript{17}

As the language changes, the name loses its original narrow

\textsuperscript{15} Cassirer, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{16} Cassirer, pp. 17-21. (quotes Usener)

\textsuperscript{17} Cassirer, p. 3.
meaning and develops a personality of its own. New connotations and relations with the original object or impression which it represented now develop. An accident of phonetic changes or the obsolescence of its verbal root may induce this evolution. Now a symbol, the name is soon related to other symbols. This is the beginning of logical conception which delivers intuitions from the isolation in which they originally occur and connects them in a discursive system.

Cassirer associates the mythic state of mind and primitive man's reliance on magic and ritual. In discursive or theoretical thinking, words serve primarily to relate concepts or experiences. For primitive man, however, intense immediate intuition is "focused and one might say reduced to a single point, the mythic or linguistic form emerges and the word or momentary god is created."  

Since he has no basis for systematic comparison, the inevitable result is reverence for the symbol which represents an intense experience; that symbol may be a word. A congruence between the symbol and the circumstances with which its feeling is associated is firmly established. Indeed

18 Cassirer, p. 32.

19 Cassirer, p. 57.
primitive man often conceives of purely mental assets such as speech in physical terms. Success in hunting and fishing may be attributed to the use of the proper magic formula. As I mentioned earlier, the case in *Waiting for Godot* is similar—the men find themselves waiting, then ask why they are waiting: "for Godot, of course." Eventually they have a formula which provides succor for their questions. "We can't leave. We're waiting for Godot."

My purpose in reviewing Cassirer's theory of the origin of rudimentary linguistic forms is to establish the characteristics of a state of mind likely to depend on magic and ritual. We may call that state mythic, savage, or primitive and cite its dominance in the consciousness of a native, an Indian, a priest, a schizophrenic, or modern man. The quasi-pragmatic realm of a mythic mind is magic and ritual: the prescription for getting things done.

Often, according to Geza Roheim, an incantation is recited, then followed by realistic behavior. The action is thus two-fold.

One of my friends on Normanby Island once gave me an incantation for killing crocodiles... Then he described how he killed the crocodile with an axe. He had both the faith that he could do it (a knowledge of the incantation) and the necessary tools. Without magic, the natives said, we could do nothing at all.20

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Branislaw Malinowski's study of Melanesians in *Magic, Science, and Religion* also notes the intermingling of practical and magical activity. The natives have extensive knowledge of soil, pest, and weather conditions and are extremely careful, even scientific in their gardening procedures. But the magician who leads the gardening magic is considered indispensable to the success of the harvest and is supposed to thwart unaccountable and adverse influences. The natives make a strong distinction between practical activities and magical ones, but both realms are indispensable to the crop. Whether the crops will grow without magic is not known because magic has always been used.

James B. Frazer describes at great length the nature of the rituals which the crocodile killer or the Melanesian gardener perform. He cites two basic magical principles: like produces like, or imitative magic, and things once in contact continue to act on each other at a distance after the contact has been severed. This is contagious magic.

In imitative magic, a woman's early rising will insure that her absent husband wakes on time and pregnant women

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are able to communicate their fertility. A mock calamity may be staged to circumvent a real one for one literally acts out a desired effect and expects the event to occur as a result.

In contagious magic

a magical sympathy is supposed to exist between a man and any severed portion of his person as his hair or nails, so that whoever gets possession of human hair or nails may work his will at any distance upon the person from whom they were cut.23

A "contagious" affinity exists between a wounded man and the weapon which hurt him because the blood of the injured remains on the weapon. Things once physically associated remain so, in spite of ensuing distance between them.

One more principle of magic should be noted: ritual usually accompanies periods of transition and activities essential to survival. Says Roheim:

It is a familiar fact that we dislike change. The result is that we abreact our anxieties in ritual. It is generally known . . . that transition rites are the most universal forms of ritual.24

Hunting, growing, marriage, death, birth, puberty, and war

23 Frazer, p. 38.

24 Roheim, p. 49.
are all made palatable through ritual. Malinowski has further explained that tradition is supremely valuable to the community.

The primitive man's share of knowledge, his social fabric, his customs and beliefs are the invaluable yield of devious experience of his forefathers... Thus, of all his qualities, truth to tradition is the most important and a society which makes its tradition sacred has gained by it an inestimable advantage of power and permanence.25

Transition must be effected smoothly or it can lead to crisis, so the normal changes in life are incorporated into the life of the tribe as symbolic acts. Initiative ceremonies are the dramatic expression of the crucial nature of tradition, for the threat to tradition—change—must be institutionalized as ritual. "Nothing matters as much as the conformity and conservatism" of the community, says Malinowski; differences of opinion are never tolerated. The sacredness of tradition is assured when it is incorporated as magic.

To summarize, it is useful to turn to Geza Roheim's

26 Malinowski, p. 39.
27 Malinowski, p. 60.
Magic and Schizophrenia. Roheim calls magic the basic element in thought and the initial phase of any activity; it is primarily manifested in the uttering of wishes or incantations. In order to win something from the environment, we first express such a desire; magic is therefore located somewhere halfway between the pure pleasure principle and the reality principle. If it were pure pleasure principle, hallucinatory wish fulfillment would be an end in itself. If it were pure reality principle, we would set about and work to achieve a certain goal without assuming that our wish or dramatized wish is the thing that gets what we want.  

When a gap exists between desire and reality, between passivity and activity, anxiety creates a need for the extra power of magic. Indeed, Roheim believes magic to be our first response to the frustrations of reality and "without this belief in ourselves, in our own specific ability or magic, we cannot hold our own against the environment. . . ."

The relation of magic to the mythical consciousness

26 Roheim, p. 3, 9.

29 Roheim, p. 10.

30 Roheim, p. 46.

31 I shall therefore use "mythical" to refer to Cassirer's description and to suggest the prevalence of magic in the life of a person of "mythical" consciousness.
described by Cassirer is clear for as he noted, the notion that the potence of the real thing is contained in the name is a fundamental tenet of the mythmaking consciousness. The magical principle is one which deals with the world as though it were governed by our own emotions, wishes and drives. Thus, an ancient association between an impulsive jump into the river to hide from an enemy develops into the belief that bathing is a necessary preparation for war. A specific ritual evolves and is always employed in that particular situation. The ritual is never tested or challenged; rather, it becomes sacred.

Now, why are Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Godot? Recall the bleak landscape-prison which begets their naive faith: time is indeterminate, as are distinctions between dreaming and waking, truth and illusion. The two play and tell tales—they gesticulate with their voices. In this orderless world, "things seem reasonable until they become a habit... for habit is a great deadener." (58) Beckett implies that habit—and perhaps tradition as well—begets primitive faith. The system of long standing will cull unquestioning belief and necessarily spawn behavior similar to that of the sorcerer. Magic occurs in crisis situations when change threatens to disrupt, for "truth to tradition" is the sacred task of society's members. We may further
hypothesize that when any long cherished world crumbles, man will revert to some kind of magic gesture. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett asserts that our age is comparably disintegrated.

William Faulkner specifically attributes these very qualities to the South, the soul, and the world in the face of dying old norms. I choose him as a stepping stone to Beckett because, for many of his characters, tradition assumes that sacred quality I have discussed. He can explain to us at least part of what happened to Vladimir and Estragon before we met them.

*The Sound and the Fury* is about the collapse of the Compson family and consists of four narrated sections which reveal varying interpretations of the same events. I shall discuss Quentin Compson in detail because he is most drastically affected by his family's failure; his emotions can perhaps be likened to those of a civilization in crisis.

The most strikingly mythic characteristic of Quentin Compson is the obsessive nature of his preoccupations, as Cassirer described it, the concentration of all forces to a single point. His world pivots on one central principle:

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that time separates us from events, then reduces and finally destroys their emotional impact. Nature and change, therefore, are Quentin's anathema so he fixes on his sister to symbolize the Compson honor, a relic from the past which must not change. Since the Compson code prescribes sexual purity as its first condition, any deviation is literally cataclysmic for Quentin.

We see Quentin through an extended interior monologue in the second section of *The Sound and the Fury*. It is the last day of his life; and as he prepares for his suicide, he recalls his life with Caddy. We learn of her summer affair with Dalton Ames, her subsequent marriage to Sidney Herbert Head, and the devastating effect of these events on Benjy and Quentin. The whining self-centered Mrs. Compson figures loudly in Quentin's memory, while it is evident that Mr. Compson's advice and counsel has enormously influenced his son.

Mr. Compson's pose is that of the detached observer counseling acceptance of life's ultimate triviality. The only voice in Quentin's reverie who evaluates his fragmented recollections for him (except occasionally Shreve), he would be described by Cassirer, as Walter Brylowski has explained, as a discursive empiric voice attempting to persuade his son to measure his experience, his code, his
disappointment against the whole of man's knowledge—to test his assertions about Caddy by relating them to the behavior of a much larger society.

The first of his father's echoes we hear from Quentin is that

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\text{no battle is ever won . . . the field only reveals to man his own folly and despair and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools. (93)}
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When speaking of women and virginity, he insists on their affinity for evil and counsels respect for the "women's reasons" that are so often mysterious. After asserting that "Men invented virginity, not women . . . purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature" (143), he accuses Quentin of confusing sin and morality.

But Mr. Compson is primarily useful as a character because he helps the reader to pinpoint Quentin's real obsession which is with time. Caddy's loss of virginity represents the inevitable process of change in nature. Says Mr. Compson, "It's nature is hurting you, not Caddy." (143) Because he feels that experience must have import, Quentin sees change only in terms of pain and loss.

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33 Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh: Myth in the Novels (Detroit, 1968), p. 74. Brylowski describes Quentin's mind as mythic according to Cassirer's definition, but he does not discuss in detail the nature of Quentin's language and action as an emblem of his mythic state of mind.
if it was that simple to do it wouldn't be anything and if it wasn't anything, what was I (183)

The enormity of the experience or emotion determines the speed with which time will relegate it to a blurry state of unimportance. As Herbert tells Quentin, after you've been out in the world for ten years, things don't matter so much. And Mr. Compson says, "any live man is better than any dead man, but no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man." (125) Since the anonymity of men and their memories is insufferable to Quentin, his dilemma is insoluble, for time is always victorious; as Mr. Compson recognizes, it is the "mausoleum of all hope and desire . . . the reducto absurdum of all human experience . . ." (93)

Secondly, the reader will recognize Mr. Comson's attitude as a more usual response to disappointment and change. We can thus compare it to Quentin's and get a kind of public perspective on his obsession. For example, Cleanth Brooks has shown that despite Mr. Compson's cynical pose, there is ample evidence that Caddy's behavior has profoundly affected him. Caddy remarks to Quentin: "Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesn't stop drinking and he won't stop he can't stop since I since last summer." (154) Says Mr. Brooks:
Evidently the knowledge of his daughters wantonness had hit Mr. Compson hard and his parade of cynicism about women and virginity, so much of which Quentin recalls on the day of his death, must have been in part an attempt to soften the blow for Quentin and perhaps for himself.  

Mr. Compson's verbal advice counterpoints his own felt actions. At any rate, he functions for the reader as moderator of Quentin's impressions.

By contrast, Quentin does not compare his sister's loss of sexual purity with anything; rather, he attempts to reinstate the constancy of his private world by substituting himself for Dalton Ames in an incest fantasy. Father says, "In the South you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about ... nothing is even worth the changing of it." (96)

Thus, Mr. Compson defines Quentin's obsession for the reader and gives us a standard by which to evaluate Quentin's attitudes: that of acceptance and reason at least on a verbal level. Conversely, Quentin is unable to accept

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35 Brylowski, p. 75.

36 It is the existence of such a standard which disappears in Beckett's work; this I will discuss in detail later in the paper.
any deviation from his personal vision of reality. Finally, while Mr. Compson's approach to Quentin is persuasive, Quentin tries to coerce Caddy and all experience into his particular pattern. It is this trait that I wish to discuss in detail.

James B. Frazer points out that when magic deals with spirits in its proper form

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\text{it treats them exactly in the same fashion as it treats inanimate objects, that is, it constrains or coerces instead of conciliating or propitiating them. . . . thus it assumes that all personal beings whether human or divine are in the last resort subject to those impersonal forces which control all things but which nevertheless can be turned to account by anyone who knows how to manipulate them by the appropriate ceremonies and spells.}^{37}
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We might call Quentin's closed system of honor the "impersonal force" of which Frazer speaks. Cleanth Brooks calls Quentin's love for his sister "self conscious, formal, even abstract," and notes that although he is emotionally committed to honor, it has lost its connection with reality; "it is abstract, rigidified, even literary."^{39}

That self-styled order is inviolable, yet totally

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37 Frazer, pp. 51-52.
38 Brooks, p. 327.
39 Brooks, p. 337.
unadaptable to transition. Herein we see Quentin's main affinity with primitive man. Injection of lovers into Caddy's life is a threat to the prominent place he has occupied in her life. Since his temperament demands a coercive central principle he cannot suffer the flexibility and freedom regarding Compson honor and traditional morality which Caddy finally represents. As Olga Vickery suggests, Caddy really only slights that honor, but Quentin insists that she has destroyed it so it can assume the significance he has attributed to it all along.

His desperation is exemplified in a number of instances, most obviously when he acts the insufferable prig by demanding "answers" from his sister—where were you? why must you get married? and so on. At another point, he volunteers to act as her procurer—"maybe I could find a husband for her." (126).

Denied the eternal paradise of sexual purity (or isolation through innocence), Quentin then wishes for the eternal "clean flame" of a hell where he and his sister can be isolated in sin: "if it could just be a hell

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41 Vickery, p. 39.
beyond that the clean flame the two of us more than
dead. . . ." (144) The sin monstrous enough to insulate
the two in hell is incest, but even that would require
participation in the natural and Quentin admits to his
father that it never happened.

Faulkner concretizes the magical character of Quen¬
tin's responses in many other ways. He often reacts to the
consolation of others which he feels is meaningless, with
a kind of chant, "You had no sister . . . did you have a
sister?" All the conditions of his situation must be met
by anyone who hopes to sympathise, just as a ritual will
fail if not enacted perfectly.

Furthermore, he attributes a physical substance to
his shadow which he constantly "tricks." As Frazer demon¬
strates, a savage may "regard his shadow or reflection as
his soul, or at all events as a vital part of himself." 42
The text repeatedly confirms this attitude in Quentin.

I stepped into sunlight, finding my
shadow again. I walked down the steps
just ahead of it. (101)

my shadow leaning flat upon the water, so
easily had I tricked it that it would not
quit me. At least 50 feet it was, and if I
only had something to blot it into the
water, holding it until it was drowned. (111)

42
Frazer, p. 189.
Similarly, Quentin assumes unconsciously that a desired effect may result from a pragmatically unrelated cause. For example, he leaves Caddy's wedding invitation unopened, as though ignoring the invitation would make the wedding evaporate.

He also treats time in mythic and magical fashion. As Cassirer observed, and as we saw in *Waiting for Godot*, no distinct lines exist between past-present-future because the immediate concerns of the savage overwhelm him.

Neither has Quentin any day-month-year measures. For him, as for Benjy, the past is not ordered chronologically, but only by the value and relevance of the event, "by the heart" and these memories intrude continually on his preparations and speeches during this day. Quentin is not conscious of his insulting Gerald Bland because in his mind he is reliving his fight with Dalton Ames. Tenses are jumbled throughout his reverie. This amplifies our sense that Quentin cannot take things for what they mean indirecely, but only for their immediate appearance. All intuition whether it refers to past, present, or future incident is focused to that single point—its pertinence to his present feelings, and his language reflects this

tendency. Mrs. Bland's conversation, "and Gerald's grand-
father always picked his own mint before breakfast," 
though happening in the present is supremely irrelevant 
to Quentin's situation and is interrupted by his recollec-
tion of a former scene with Caddy: When I lifted my hand 
I could still feel crisscrossed twigs and grass burning 
into the palm." The tense here is appropriate, but Quen-
tin's simultaneous sense that this event is still occurring 
means that he also remembers it in the present tense:

poor Quentin
She leaned back on her arms her hands locked about 
her knees
you've never done that have you 
what done what 
that what I have what I did 
yes yes lots of times with lots of girls (188)

Quentin's mythical apprehension of time is thus revealed in 
his speech.

His preoccupation with time is also symbolized by his 
fixation on clocks. He repeatedly notes the time; indeed, 
at one point he describes himself as a clock:

I would begin counting to sixty and 
folding down one finger and thinking of 
the other fourteen fingers waiting to be 
folded down . . . after a while I'd be 
afraid I'd gotten behind and I'd count 
fast and fold down another finger. . . .(108-9)

Early on, he methodically twists the hands off his watch 
in a ritual attempt to escape the hour.
Faulkner's creation is really a cocoon that refuses to split open. One particular stage in the Compson-Southern evolution is seized and exalted by Quentin and he budge's no further. Hence the pervasive half-light concretized in the atmosphere reminiscent of Waiting for Godot. Quentin's isolation from the reality of his peers is bathed in twilight, greyness, darkness. He notices the time in the first line of his section by looking at a shadow:

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. (93)

"Scuttering dead leaves" (96) fill the street and Quentin insistently notices the shadows thrown by the stoop. His memories of Caddy are always pictured in "twilight." (130, 160, etc.) The honeysuckle smell which Quentin associates with Caddy's sexuality becomes the "saddest odor of all." (210) Faulkner makes the relation specific:

the whole thing came to symbolize night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of grey halflight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who. . . . (211)

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44 Vickery, p. 41.
Quentin is revealed as paralyzed man—a ponderer who cannot act and who psychically transforms the lush sensuous honeysuckle into something thick and grey. As he walks, the light dwindles, the air darkens. His secret feelings take visible form which then mocks him; the spirits literally haunt him in surreal intensity. He is a half-man, living in twilight, the Prufrock of Harvard who cannot tell if "I was I was not who was not was not who."

Geza Roheim has asserted that our basic scheme for influencing the environment is simple: wish plus action equals result. If the system fails, we fall back on our own resources. That is, frustration in reality may sever the link between the internalized word-wish and whatever it purports to represent or control. The result is the impotent commands made by Vladimir and Estragon and Quentin. Regarding Quentin, Olga Vickery states the theory slightly differently: he tries to trick experience into conformity with his pattern. For instance, Quentin knows that to uphold the Compson code he must either drive Dalton Ames away or shoot him, but he is unable even to hurt him. His

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45 Roheim, p. 107.

46 Brooks, p. 336.
response to the frustration of paralysis is the trappings of action—magic—which in psychoanalytic literature has come to signify limitation, or identification or the playing of a role. . . (so) that a recitation of events which occurred in the mythical past will inevitably cause these events to recur.\footnote{Roheim, pp. 37-38.}

Left uttering the empty words of an obsolete tradition, Quentin is helpless before the changes in his sister. He thinks when he confronts Dalton Ames "my mouth said it I didn't say it at all." (198) His suicide pact with Caddy ends when he drops his knife.

Faulkner foreshadows Quentin's reaction in a number of scenes where imagined events are felt as actual. The Deacon tells stories until he believes them. (120) Quentin listens to fishermen

> their voices insistent and contradictory making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an uncontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words. (145)

Another time

> when Louis called the dogs he sounded just like the horn he carried slung on his shoulder and never used, but clearer, mellower, as though his voice were a part of darkness and silence curling out of it, coiling into it again. Whoo000o00000000000000000000000000 (142)
Quentin abstracts sounds even from being heard. He thinks when a bell sounds -- "the last stroke ceased vibrating. It stayed in the air more felt than heard for a long time." (97) Benjy's dismay at Caddy's sexual indulgences becomes in Quentin's memory a "bellowing his voice hammered back and forth between the walls in waves ... his voice hammering back and forth as though its own momentum would not let it stop as though there were no place for it in silence bellowing ..." (154) He can feel laughter in his throat. These examples of Quentin's speech and thought are the reasons that he "talks like they do in minstrel shows." (148) Speech is an act or a felt sound, comically imprecise and pathetically impotent. He does not shoot Herbert, rather, in his imagination, he shoots his voice: "Quentin has shot all of their voices through the floor of Caddy's room" (131, 137, 138) as if killing the sound of Herbert will kill Herbert.

The ritual significance Quentin attributes to the word is noted again and again. Caddy asks him, "do you think if I say it, it won't be?" (151) Says Quentin, "I'll tell Father, then it'll have to be." (195) Finally the most telling act Quentin tries to realize through language alone is his incest fantasy.

If so
If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us I have committed incest father it was I it was not Dalton Ames (97-98)

But Mr. Compson notes sadly that people cannot do anything very dreadful.

You wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been (220)

Fiction obliterates fact. Language has the power to soothe trouble out of existence. Roheim tells us that the frustration of our wishes means that we must believe in "our own specific ability or magic . . . (or) we cannot hold our own against the environment." Quentin's environment is full of change and his tools for facing the world are relics which have no relation to empirical reality. His magical attitude to language parallels his stubborn clinging to the past: that is, whether or not he is conscious of the divorce between his wishes and their realization, he continues to act as though they are coming true. The failure of his system paralyzes him; he withdraws and dies. But as his uncertainty and loneliness grow, he frantically invokes the old way, the old code to save himself, as do

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48 Roheim, p. 46.
Vladimir and Estragon. All three revert to magic gesture.

Earlier I discussed the prominence of tradition as an ordering principle in an infant culture and the need for ritual when change threatens the old order. The story of Quentin Compson is the story of an individual or Southern or universal tradition which crumbles. While that order is disintegrating, language provides a sort of balm for Quentin's feelings of impotence. The similar reliance on language is, however, ruthlessly analyzed by Samuel Beckett in his second novel, *Watt*.  

*Watt* is specifically about an isolated obscure chap seeking a role so he may hold his own against his surroundings. Like Quentin he acts as if his values have already been defined, but unlike Quentin, he is unsure of his brand of "rightness." And so he makes a journey to Mr. Knott's.

His particular system for relating to his surroundings is a mechanical logic whose energy depends on words. In a sense, impotent utterance replaces the code of honor in Quentin's mores; said another way, the code of honor is transformed by time into impotent utterance—but Quentin fails to recognize the change. He simply believes, and his

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anguish is assuaged, at least temporarily.

Samuel Beckett recognizes that change. He systematically undermines the ability of language to exorcise or to convey meaning or to formulate rational perception, all of which it does for Quentin and Mr. Compson. One might say that their situation is reduced to its lowest terms by Beckett.

Robert Penn Warren's description of the essential themes in Faulkner is applicable to Watt.

Perhaps the blind, blank, dehumanized and dehumanizing . . . modern war is the appropriate metaphor for our age . . . we may say that war is merely an extension of our kind of peace . . . Perhaps the images of violence in which Faulkner's work abounds are . . . not of the South but of the soul . . . this order of violence . . . is associated with the assertion of, or the quest for selfhood, the discovery of a role, or the declaration of a value, in the context of anonymous violence or blankness . . . the isolation of the self imposed by the wrong relation to history or to nature.50

A well-defined flux of events which subverted tradition was the symbol of time's authority for Quentin and his fears are pinpointed in his discussions with his father. Such definition is banished from Beckett's novel. The anonymity imposed by time is fully realized in Watt where a search

for identity takes place in "the context of anonymous violence." The self is not isolated because of its "wrong relation to history or to nature" as in Faulkner, rather, Watt discovers that no "right" relation exists. This oppression is emphasized by the setting and atmosphere, the absence of multiple narrative perspectives, the obscurity of the hero, and the style of the novel.

The plot of Watt is simple and direct. The first section opens with a group of chatting people at a tram station who suddenly notice a strange figure approaching. This is Watt who proceeds to the house of Mr. Knott as a servant, one of a long series of servants who serve for a time on the ground floor, then on the first floor, and then leave. The third section is set in an asylum and we learn that Watt's friend, Sam, is the narrator for the entire book. Sam tells us of Watt's experiences on both floors and finally in section four, Watt returns to the tram station and embarks for the end of the line.

We can recall that Faulkner symbolized Quentin's insulation from commoner notions of reality with twilight and shadow. Beckett creates an identical setting for Watt who is merely alone—not separated from any rational companion. In the first scene at the station, the sun is setting and Beckett is careful to universalize his image
of impending darkness. Mr. Hackett gazes over the fields, the "low tottering walls, the stream, the bluff, the fields, foothills" which are falling into the shadow. In the lines immediately preceding the switch to Watt's story, the pervasiveness of darkness is once again emphasized:

He [Hackett] looked towards the horizon that he had come out to see of which he had seen so little. Now it was quite dark. Yes now the western sky was as the eastern which was as the southern, which was as the northern. (24)

This is the obscure and elusive world around Watt. The only source of light, the moon, is "an unpleasant yellow color . . . waning, waning." (30) Indeed, two things Watt dislikes are the sun and the moon. Mr. Knott's room lies in "empty hush in airless gloom." The place Watt chooses to rest enroute to Knott's is a ditch full of nettles and wild grass. Later, the asylum where Sam, the narrator, and Watt meet consists of mansions full of "separate soundless unlit warmth"—cells for each individual where they lie alone. Between the mansions is a garden where the two meet which is a psychic landscape for the trials obstructing their encounter. "Pale aspens and yews ever dark" grow thickly and rise from "wild pathless grass." The two walk together in "shade, heavy, trembling, fierce, tempestuous." In winter, the grass is "wild and withered,"
the trees are reduced to thin writhing shadows. Grass "strangles" any flowers. Indeed, Sam and Watt build a bridge from opposite banks toward each other as "thickets rise at every turn, brakes of impenetrable density and towering masses of brambles." And their particular friends are the long black rats. Fittingly enough, Sam refers to the place as the "void." (152-159)

The desolation of this landscape subsumes all events and characters for Beckett cloaks his world in shadow, twilight, brambles to emphasize the impossibility of seeing clearly. But instead of "stable things becoming shadowy paradoxical" as for Quentin, there is no process here. Things are shrouded and obscure; no gradual break with reality is recorded. With no past and no father to consult, there can be no dialog.

The public perspective we get in Watt is not one of counsel and reflection as with Shreve and Mr. Compson in The Sound and the Fury. The public itself is represented in the two tram station scenes, the first of which is dominated by Mr. Hackett. Their impressions of Watt are mainly derisive. Behind a tram they see a "motionless, a solitary figure lit less and less by the receding lights until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the din wall behind it." (16) Tety Mixon is not sure whether it is a man or a woman. The group confuse "it" with a parcel or a carpet. Watt is so still he looks like stone or a sewer-pipe and he certainly does not "invite mention."
Mr. Nixon knows Watt and tells his friends that he is an experienced traveller who would "turn the other cheek if he had the energy." (20) He has no fixed address, a huge red nose, and drinks nothing but milk. The others press Hackett for more information: nationality? occupation? distinctive signs? but he claims to be in utter ignorance of Watt and finally cries, "I tell you nothing is known . . . nothing." (21)

Indeed, we learn virtually nothing about any of the characters except their names. All the new arrivals at Mr. Knott's look alike. Watt himself is the perfect stranger--mistaken for everyone else. Sam identifies Watt with Mr. Knott; Nixon confuses Hackett and Watt: "when I see him, or think of him, I think of you . . ." (19) Watt could also be called mechanical man for "after one or two false starts [he is] again in motion" and he strolls gear perfect with Sam in the asylum garden. His arms dangle; he stumbles like a rag doll.

The only other public notice of Watt is at the end when Messrs. Nolan and Gorman souse him with a slop bucket. The opening scene at the tram, then, serves several important functions. First, it establishes the mood of grey oblivion which will characterize the Knott world which Watt wishes to penetrate. That landscape is pervasive everywhere and makes the truth supposedly hiding in the twilight impossible
to find. Instead, "visible form(s) antic and perverse mocking without relevance" haunt Watt just as they did Quentin Compson in a similar universe. All is in question.

This brings us to several other differences and affinities between the two works, which I will mention briefly. In Watt, we learn that the hero of the novel is anonymous, not momentous. Remembering that Quentin Compson was horrified at time's dismissal of individuals to obscurity and so schemed to elevate himself and his loved ones to eternal prominence, one finds his fears realized in Watt where such worries are past history. Watt is isolated and obscure; further pretentions to status are never entertained.

Another contrast between the two works is the type of narration. Faulkner gives us multiple perspectives to compare in The Sound and the Fury. The novel's form is to present three private views and a fourth public view of the same events. Within Quentin's section, Shreve and especially Mr. Compson offer a continual alternative to Quentin's position. But in Watt, there is only one speaker, the narrator, Sam, who reports what Watt reported to him. The reader is far removed from close understanding of the events related; nothing is known; only the surface is apparent. We stumble with Watt along the outside.
Finally we can look to the style of these novels for a more thorough comparison.

Some critics like Walter Slatoff feel that Faulkner, like Quentin, has no viable solutions for the various conflicts that engulf his characters. His style therefore reflects his own uncertainty just as Quentin's magic indicates the extent of his lack of control over his environment. For example, in Faulkner's novels, his attitude is generally irrationalistic—he prefers to throw an image stream at the reader for hypnotic effect in an attempt to approach truth through the heart rather than to discover it absolutely with the head. He is convinced that such a discovery is not possible. He describes Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury thus:

She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark. . . . and above that collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones themselves being outside the flesh, lifted into the driving day with an expression at once fatalistic and of a child's astonished disappointment. . . . (331)

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I have underlined some of the images existing in unresolved tension, some of the qualifiers ("almost", etc.) which make Faulkner's descriptions so often lengthy and repetitive. He avoids the equation of a single word for a single feeling because of his certainty that "words don't ever fit even what they're trying to say at."

Walter Slatoff suggests that Faulkner's motive is to make the reader's experience of his work truly empathic by immersing him inside the emotions, desires and possibilities which swirl inside anyone's head. He wants to prevent us from translating feelings into abstract formulae. Accordingly, he eliminates punctuation from his character's stream of consciousness because that is pure feeling while open discussion (such as the authorial description of Dilsey quoted above) retains the order of capitals and commas. Sentences communicated to a reader or between characters represent feeling and must by definition be subjected to an artificial order such as punctuation. But in the solipsism of memory, Quentin feels like this: "and he


53 Slatoff, p. 246.

54 Slatoff, p. 249.
must just stay awake and see evil done for a little while its not always and i it doesn't have to be even that long for a man of courage and he do you consider that courage and i yes sir dont you. . . ." (219) The effect of this style is urgency and immediacy entirely appropriate to Quentin's mythic apprehension reality.

Beckett is concerned with this same divorce between expression and essential meaning. But, like Cassirer, he questions the assumption that an absolute "essence" of meaning should be considered. Faulkner recognizes the difficulty of describing such a realm with language and logic and Beckett undeniably agrees. But he even is more emphatic and says that the evidence that language cannot really expose anything except itself still does not undermine our faith in it. The result is the style of Watt which insists that our reliance on discursive language is magical and naive:

Naive because we believe it to represent something, when, in reality, it does not or cannot represent anything in particular except itself. Instead, it is a product of our need to give our spontaneous impressions concrete form; that form is independent of the emotion which spawned it. Beckett does as Cassirer wished and regards symbols (words being our favorite) as original forces which
posit their own laws. Language assumes the authority of a god, but lacks even the meagre legitimacy it retained when it could still describe object or feeling with reasonable accuracy. Language is therefore an ignoble, a false god. The final defense against a chaos of undifferentiated impressions—both Mr. Compson's reasoned explanations and Quentin's mythical chanting are shattered by Beckett. Accordingly, Watt's system is logical language; it is exposed as a system of sounds randomly related to the meaning they are presumed to reflect.

Beckett undercuts our dependence on language by playing with it on every level in his novel. The most superficial example is the word play itself. For example, Mr. Spiro, the neo-John Thomist, called by friends D-U-N, anagram of HUD, edits Crux, the popular Catholic monthly. Among their prize competitions is this one: "Rearrange the fifteen letters of the Holy Family to form a question and answer . . .

Winning entry: Has J Jurms a po? Yes." This comic anagram prefigures the more serious and frenetic word-games of Watt.

Words are mispelled: woom, piano chooners. We are faced with ? marks, footnotes which occasionally explain but often clarify nothing; editor's notes such as "hiatus in manuscript," addenda. Cliches are sprinkled throughout:
"If there were two things that Watt loathed, one was the earth and the other was the sky." (36)

In the tram station, Goff and Tetty rhyme with each other:

We heard the cries, said Goff
Judge of their surprise, said Tetty (15)

 Often the rhyme simply appears in the text in paragraph form:

For when on Sam the sun shone bright, then in a vacuum panted Watt and when Watt like a leaf was tossed, then stumbled Sam in deepest night (153)

The incongruity of the childish rhythm of cliche and rhyme to the image of violent aloneness is clear. By causing his text to virtually play games with itself in rhyme, anagram, cliche, misspelling, has not Beckett chipped away at some of the dependability of the word?

Our aspirations to the logician's detachment are reduced to analogous game-playing in Watt himself. As Ruby Cohn has said, Watt

attacks on an irrational order of reality with tools of the habitual world--his senses his most noble faculties and his mind, whatever that might mean.55

Supposedly, a careful logical analysis of his situation might

have saved Quentin. (Certainly his father thought so). But Watt's rational approach is thoroughly ridiculed by Beckett. Watt's "analyses" are interminable lists outlining various approaches as well as dogged placement of everything in series. Meticulous detail and literalism result in a "clumsy exactitude." Endless qualifiers are added to every statement, and each thought is completely restated whenever it is embellished. The surface of the environment is exhaustively measured, for Watt's only talent is naming.

The ultimate test of Watt's approach comes at Mr. Knott's. For him, thought does not precede articulation; rather thought equals language. Despite this, Jacqueline Hoefer has called Watt's awareness of a meaning other than that on the most literal linguistic level his tragic flaw—that is, the curiosity which leads him to Knott's. Another critic has noted that those who enter the Knott world must refrain from rational thought for Mr. Knott's house is shifting, elusive, unknowable. Watt's attempt to understand [References]

56 Cohn, p. 87.
58 Hoefer, p. 63.
it is gradually reduced to "prolonged and irksome meditations" that leave him "sicker and aloner" than ever. (130, 143).

His frustration is foreshadowed by his predecessor, Arsene, who gives a short speech as he departs. Says Arsene, Knott's house is where all the old ways lead, where "in a word he will be in his midst at last, after so many tedious years spent clinging to the perimeter." (40, 41)

We may take "his midst" literally, I think, as man's source, his self, his center. "He is working not merely for Mr. Knott . . . but indeed chiefly for himself." (41) But the calm and security Arsene felt when first arriving leaves him one day when "something slipped . . . millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one nearby and furtively as though it were forbidden." (42-43) At this point, the distinction between what was inside Arsene's "personal system" and what was outside it was "not easy to draw." (43) Objects are transformed; they look different. But his head can no longer be troubled— it feels as though it is falling off; he regrets everything.

Armed with his logical language, Watt stumbles into this irrational realm where thought is inarticulate, sensuous. Arsene calls words and expressions blasphemous because what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable
or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed to fail. (62)

Watt's uncertainty about Mr. Knott grows as he resists all attempts at utterance or effability just as Quentin's unease increases as his code of honor fails to bend to changing experience. Knott sometimes rises early, sometimes late which leads Watt to an unrelated speculation on the Lynch family and his conviction that a pot cannot necessarily be called pot with any great certainty. Mr. Knott is close and far, light and dark, neither languorous or feverish, his speech is gibberish; he never looks the same twice. He sings in a monotone, he needs nothing, he constantly rearranges his furniture—in short, Watt concludes, "fixed" was not an adjective to be applied to Mr. Knott. Watt's attitude towards him is appropriately ambivalent—he admits toward the end of his service on the first floor that he both wishes and fears to see Mr. Knott face to face.

If we closely examine Watt's analyses of the elusive Knott, we will see that in addition to openly making fun of the serious ability of words to represent experience with puns, rhyme, etc., Beckett subtly maneuvers alleged discursive language into illogic. For instance, a seven day supply of Mr. Knott's food (a single nutritious dish)
is cooked each Saturday night, then served to him each day at twelve o'clock noon and at seven p.m. exactly. To whom, Watt wonders, was this arrangement due? A past dietician, Knott himself, a past domestic, or yet another? He considers twelve possibilities which can be boiled down to four: Mr. Knott is responsible or he is not; he either knows or does not know who is responsible for the arrangement and, in any case, he is obviously content with it. But the first two possibilities which occur to Watt are stated thus:

1. Mr. Knott was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that he was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that such an arrangement existed, and was content.

2. Mr. Knott was not responsible for the arrangement, but knew who was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that such an arrangement existed, and was content. (89)

The second part of the phrase in #1 "that he was responsible for the arrangement" is added to lend an aura of relentless thoroughness to the speculation, though obviously if Mr. Knott did himself conceive of his dietary schedule, he would probably be aware of that. The phrase also anticipates the second possibility—that Knott knew who was responsible for the arrangement. The words who and he can thus be mechanically interchanged throughout the list of twelve conjectures. When the phrase reads "but knew who was
responsible," it makes sense; but the insertion of "he" renders its meaning at the very least redundant and certainly laughable. As Watt grinds through his list of twelve possibilities, it becomes clear that he is simply rearranging words and phrases to slightly alter the way the words themselves look and sound—but without regard for the content. The appearance of rigorous logic is maintained, for all of the speculations are grammatically correct, but whether they make sense is left to chance. Number five, for instance, could be true if Knott forgot his own arrangement, but ten is gibberish.

5. Mr. Knott was responsible for the arrangement, but did not know who was responsible for the arrangement, nor that any such arrangement existed, and was content.

10. Mr. Knott was not responsible for the arrangement, but knew that he was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that such an arrangement existed, and was content. (89, 90).

Because the hypotheses are only haphazardly meaningful, the following solemn conclusion is transformed into delightful low-keyed humor which pervades this novel:

Other possibilities occurred to Watt, in this connexion, but he put them aside, and quite out of his mind, as unworthy of serious consideration, for the time being. (90)

This incongruity is strengthened by the tone of Watt's more rigorous speculations, for they retain all the appearances of logic: they are arranged in lists and
consider various approaches to the problem at hand. But perhaps their reasonableness depends most on the fact that they are stated with authority. And the rhythm of these sentences is fast enough that a reader, like Watt, can easily be carried contentedly through them without noticing what they fail to say. In fact, Watt's original curiosity about the origin of Knott's meal arrangements leads to questions about the famished dog who eats the leftovers (11 pages long) and finally to the Lynch family (16 pages). It is quite easy to forget the original question which spawned these mammoth conjectures. But we soon learn that the relevance of those conjectures to the answers Watt seeks is minimal.

... once Watt had grasped, in its complexity, the mechanism of this arrangement, how the food came to be left, and the dog to be available, and the two to be united, then it interested him no more, and he enjoyed a comparative peace of mind. ... (117)

Watt can evidently speak at great length without understanding, and Beckett gives us other clues to suggest his limitations as analyst. When he boards the train for Mr. Knott's, "it happened to be empty." Yet, fourteen lines later, he spots Mr. Spiro: "the compartment then was not so empty as Watt had first supposed." (27) He finds Knott's house in darkness, but no sooner had he entered than "he
saw the house was not in such darkness as he had first supposed, for a light was burning in the kitchen." (37) Elsewhere, while simply musing on voices that beset him from time to time, he repeats their qualities (they sang and cried and murmured and stated) over and over again in different order so that mere repetition passes for amplification. Furthermore, vague references pass for accurate description—Watt is "not familiar" and "not unfamiliar either" with the voices; we never learn his exact relation to them.

The aspirations of Watt's language to correctness and symbolic truthfulness are aborted throughout. Illogic in the guise of logic, a surety of tone where uncertainty is the rule, the rhythm of the words that lulls us into faith in them—all are ways in which Beckett subverts language with language.

Hints that a sacred mysterious "force" lurks about this setting also abound. The order in which a committee leaves its meeting is attributed to "chance or some other agency." Watt carefully counteracts his transgressions with good deeds, wondering if that "counted to him for grace" (116) and noticing that no thunderbolt or punishment fell on him. We are teased by vaguely religious phrases such as "all this will be revealed to Watt" (119) and "it was not known." (92)
Sam and Watt meet when they are impelled together "as though by some external agency." (158) Elsewhere "the notion of the arbitrary could only survive as the notion of a pre-established arbitrary." A little voice talks to Watt about Mr. Knott's experiences with animals, though Watt never knew whether this particular voice was joking or serious. A traditional symbol of divinity—a stark white light—accompanies Watt's departure from Mr. Knott's and sometimes at night he sees "a fascia of white light." (212, 223)

These references are not systematic or clear. Their very casualness is a satire of faith which flourishes on hearsay rather than evidence. But faith in what? Is not belief based on hearsay belief in hearsay? Beckett maintains that even when a discursive sentence can be exposed as hearsay, our faith in language remains intact. Arsene explains that the reason for this is pragmatic for

the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man . . . and as the only way one can speak of man, even as our anthropologists have realized is to speak of him as though he were a termite (77)

Here the trickery of language is exposed, for language (like magic) treats spirits exactly as it treats inanimate
objects. In Watt, it is confined to its most literal and inartistic level—naming—and the names themselves soon cease to designate anything.

Hence it would be wise for Watt to heed Arsene's warning against the formulaic trap. However, the first notable event of Watt's term is the arrival of two piano tuners, the Galls, which he insists on dissecting verbally. He speculates on their background and kinship and attends to the prescribed courtesies, but suddenly this usual method of dealing with events fails. He is unable to dismiss the incident with "that is what happened then." Outer meaning seems suddenly fragile . . . "the first look . . . had always been enough for Watt." But, the scene with the Galls ceased very soon to signify for Watt a piano tuned . . . and so on, if indeed it had ever signified such things, and became a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and comment comment. The fragility of outer meaning had a bad effect on Watt (73).

To reinforce the fragility of formulation as it relates to experience, a sure separation between object-experience and style also predominates in Watt. Logic is systematically employed to arrange experience in random fashion.

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Cohn, The Comic Gamut, p. 87.
All the usual means of verifying empirically are missing (such as presenting several points of view to compare, relating events into a synthetic whole, testing of assumptions, a concern for cause and effect, etc.) Watt is his own questioner and answerer; he draws a fence around himself with his speculations.

Cassirer quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt:

Man lives with his objects chiefly-in fact one may say exclusively as language presents them to him. By the same process whereby he spins language out of his own being, he ensnares himself in it and each language draws a magic circle around the people to which it belongs; a circle from which there is no escape save by stepping out of it into another. 61

If the truth of words cannot be measured against reality because "reality" is impossible to define, sentences are free to wander unchecked into unforeseen paths: "astonishing variations on a single vent" are possible. Language released from the object can assume boundless power of its own and we are left with Watt's mind-boggling speculations which insulate him from all but surface meaning. We had a kind of unsystematic inkling of this in The Sound and the Fury where Faulkner's uneasiness about the effectiveness

61 Cassirer, Language and Myth, p. 9.

62 Dieter Wellershoff, "Failure of an Attempt at deMythologization" in Critical Essays, p. 103.
of his descriptions led him to make lengthy, qualified, repetitive statements.

Furthermore, in Quentin's world, sound has an almost physical presence. "Harvard is such a fine sound ... a fine dead sound we will swap Benjy's pasture for a fine dead sound." (217) He tells Caddy to say *Dalton Ames* as his hand clutches her throat so he can feel the "surge of blood there it surged in strong accelerating beats." (203) When the "last note sounded" Quentin commits suicide so that the death of his body and the death of sound are associated. And Reverend Sheegog in section IV is like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice, with his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him ... (367)

Quentin's obsession with the past insulates him until he must collide with change; that collision exposes itself in his mystical regard for magic and ritual. Similarly, in *Watt*, the power of language itself is indisputable. For both Quentin and Watt "talk ambles unchecked ... through ever new fictions." But in *Watt*, words no longer need association with recognized physical entities such as body or blood. They are autonomous, self-propelled.

It is for these reasons that I think the scene in

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63 Wellershoff, p. 103.
Erskine’s room where Watt puzzles over a picture of a circle and a center is most significant. Critical opinion varies. That circle has been called a solipsistic circle formed by Watt and Knott. Or as a symbol of the impossibility of total solipsism, since there is a breach in the circle for which the center is searching or perhaps it is "a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively in boundless space, in endless time." (129) The breach may be what Jacqueline Hcefer calls Watt’s tragic flaw of curiosity—the crack in his linguistic cage that leads him to Mr. Knott. Perhaps the circle symbolizes the self or circle in search of itself or its centre or its soul. Knott’s house is a nightmarish empty soul landscape. Raymond Pederman sees the narrative itself as circular. It begins and ends in the tram station. Of course, the circle may signify all or none of these things. Possibly it is just language that makes a "magic circle" that has no secrets; the circle is broken, but the breach is impossible to find. No meaning is to be

64 Federman, p. 127.

65 I realize that I am analyzing the symbols of a man whom I believe to be convinced of the inherent emptiness of symbols. However his position as story teller is evidence of the probable discomfort of his pose!
found inside; we simply spin it from within our own being. For if phantoms can be made to take shape, they are manipulable.

If Watt was sometimes unsuccessful and sometimes successful ... in foisting a meaning where no meaning appeared he was most often neither the one or the other. For Watt considered that he was successful ... when he could evolve from the meticulous phantoms that beset him a hypothesis proper to disperse them ... for to explain had always been to exorcise for Watt (77-78)

The words themselves make nothing have the solidity of something; "semantic succour" is only satisfied by trying on names just as one tries on hats.

By the time Watt reaches the second floor, his faith and language break down completely. But he clings to the remnants of the logic in mystical fashion. By mechanistically rearranging words, letters, and sentences, Watt hopes to revive their power to soothe him, for before, as with his speculation on Knott's meals, if Watt could grasp the "mechanism of an arrangement ..." he could enjoy a comparative peace of mind—"turning a disturbance into words, a pillow of old words for a head." (117)

We may see Watt's entry into Erskine's room as a kind of symbolic exposé of this disintegration. He first wonders who presses the bell which he hears regularly; then, decides
he must search Erskin's pocket. Watt knows he can counterfeit simple keys, but not obscure keys just as he cannot apply his own "key" or language game to the elusive Knott. After he speaks, he ponders the words which, now said "could never be undone." He alternately regrets and is pleased with them, but mostly feels remorse. Only disturbing words affect Watt; here, he senses that his particular brand of key cannot unlock Mr. Knott. The key is the clue Watt will never find:

nor was the key the kind of key of which an impression would be taken in wax, or plaster, or putty, or butter, and reason for that was this, that possession of the key could not be obtained even for a moment (127)

Watt gets inside without a key and learns nothing. He sees the picture of the circle searching for its centre, just as he is in search of Mr. Knott. Later, he exhibits great tenderness towards a key which he leaves outside for Mr. Graves. He wraps it carefully in a blanket on a bitter night as though he realizes that a clue must exist and reveres that possibility although he is forever excluded from it.

The disintegration of Watt's language is further related by Sam, who describes Watt's voice as low, halting, and dubious when he is talking about the first floor. His habitual tone was one of assurance, but now it is rapid as
delirium or prayer. Watt recites parrot-like a frenetic nonsense as he inverts the order of words in a sentence, the order of letters within words, the order of sentences in paragraphs, etc. The following is an example of Watt's speech during this period.

Nodrap, nodrap geb
Luf puk saw?
Say he'd shave. (pp. 166, 167)

As his speech breaks down, Watt breaks down physically as well. Measuring with great care the ingredients for Mr. Knott's food taxes Watt's bodily and psychic powers to their utmost. His "moral reserves were greatly tried" and sometimes tears would fall, "tears of mental fatigue". (33)

His position with Mrs. Gorman is "post crucified." He guesses that Mr. Knott propagates waves of depression or oppression. By the end of his stay on the ground floor, he tries to relate the story of a phone call but "cracks soon appeared in the formulation . . . Watt was too tired to repair it." (143)

The ground floor has left Watt with no knowledge of Mr. Knott, "sicker and aloner" than ever, on a morning "dressed for the grave" he moves to the first floor. Watt's motions all along have been halting; by the third section, he moves backwards; his trousers are back to front. He
often falls, but always picks himself up.

His frustration and fatigue finally culminate in a longing for silence—for "isolation from the loud world."

Other traits, other little ways, little ways of passing the little days, Watt remarked in Mr. Knott and could have told had he wished if he had not been so tired, so very tired, by all he had told already (212)

His despair is the "soundless tumult of the inner lamentation... free at last, for an instant nothing at last."

(202) Finally in the last section, he cannot speak of Mr. Knott at all.

As we have seen before, for Watt, "to explain had always been to exorcise." His words sometimes related to the experience they sought to describe, sometimes not. Watt's final gibberish is mere sound-making, and he investigates those sounds with the leftovers of his systematic approach to truth (he inverts the order of letters within a word, the order of sentences in the period, etc.) We sense that what remains is the liturgy of a frantic lonely man and that Samuel Beckett is telling the tale of a frightened tale-teller.

Watt is a victim of the solipsism and anonymity that result from the complete breakdown of his linguistic resources. Like Quentin, the collapse of his life-system leaves him with only the helpless utterance of the man
estranged from his environment. Because of his total reliance on so-called logical language, any pretentions to a truly empiric attitude towards life are betrayed; rather, the seemingly logical is really mythic. Watt's fixation on language makes him as isolated, as naively faithful, and as impotent as a primitive man in his orderless hostile jungle. We are at the beginning again, as Dieter Weller-
shoff has said:

In works of modern literature we almost hear what it would be our lot to hear if suddenly there were no more art or literature . . . there is no longer a language shaped by meaning [instead] an incessant murmuring inside each of us, which says nothing and yet incessantly seems to be saying something . . . Language is secret speech without a secret.66

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