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A critical account of Samuel Beckett's
Nouvelles.

1970
Preface.

I wish to acknowledge assistance from Mr. A.J. Robbins, who discussed with me drafts of chapters 2, 3, and 4. No major additions or deletions have been made as a result of his criticisms, but an attempt has been made to improve the expression of certain points.

I wish to apologise for the lack of consistency in references and quotations, which are in some cases in the original and in others are in translation. The difficulty of obtaining certain texts was only partly responsible for this undesirable state of affairs.
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Chapter 1. Introduction.

This introduction consists of two parts, each of which considers two related topics. Firstly, there is an outline of the publishing history of the *Nouvelles*, followed by a survey of Beckett's writing career. Secondly, there is an analysis of published criticism of the *Nouvelles*, followed by a guide to the remainder of this essay.

In 1955 there was published in Paris a volume bearing the title *Samuel Beckett: Nouvelles et Textes pour rien*, containing three *nouvelles* and also the thirteen short pieces known as *Textes pour rien*. The three *nouvelles*, which are the subject of this study, bear the titles 'L'Expulsé', 'Le Calmant', and 'La Fin'. All quotations from the *Nouvelles* are taken from the edition published, with six illustrations by Avigdor Arikha, in 1958.

A publisher's note informs the reader that 'Les *Nouvelles* sont de 1945, les *Textes pour rien* de 1950.' This note may mean that the *Nouvelles* were written in 1945, or it may indicate merely that they date from this time; the latter is more probably the case. It seems likely that the *Nouvelles* were written in an early form in 1945, and revised at some time between 1945 and their publication in 1955.

The supposition that these *nouvelles* existed in an earlier form is based on the appearance in 1946-7 of 'Suite' and 'L'Expulsé' in two French-language periodicals. 'Suite', which appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* for July 1946, is clearly a version of 'La Fin', and 'L'Expulsé', which appeared in *Fontaine*
for December 1946-January 1947, is a version of the nouvelle of the same title published in 1955. These earlier versions of two of the Nouvelles are briefly discussed in the conclusion to this study.

In 1967 there was published in London a volume bearing the title Samuel Beckett: No's Knife, containing 'Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1966'. In addition to certain later works, this volume contains translations of the volume Nouvelles et Textes pour rien, under the titles 'Stories', and 'Texts for Nothing'. The stories bear the titles 'The Expelled', 'The Calmative', and 'The End', and a preface by the publishers claims that their French originals were written 'between 1945 and 1946'. The date of the translations is not given.

Unfortunately only one of the Nouvelles was translated by Beckett alone, and this is 'The Calmative'. A publisher's note indicates that the other two stories were 'Translated by Richard Seaver in collaboration with the author'; these stories were published in Evergreen Review in 1960 and 1962. The translations of the Nouvelles are briefly discussed in the conclusion to this study.

The text discussed here is the 1958 French text, which is assumed to be identical with the unobtainable French text of 1955. There are two reasons for studying the Nouvelles rather than the 'Stories': firstly, the English texts, as indicated above, are translations from the French, and are not solely Beckett's work; secondly, the Nouvelles, at least in their earlier form, were among the first works written in Beckett's adopted second language. The fact that these nouvelles were conceived in French is in itself important.
Beckett's writing career seems to fall into three periods, each of which is distinct from the others, even though together they have an unmistakable integrity. The first period, which includes *Proust, More Pricks than Kicks, Murphy,* and *Watt,* all written in English, may be regarded as consisting of immature works, marred by pervasive cleverness. The second period, which is widely regarded as the most important, consists of works written in French, including *Molloy, Malone meurt, L'Innommable,* and *En attendant Godot;* it is to this period, which extends from 1945 to 1950, that the *Nouvelles* belong, even if they were in fact revised after 1950. A long barren phase from 1951 to 1956 is followed by the third period, which consists of works of widely-differing character, conceived sometimes in French, sometimes in English, and which includes *All that Fall, Fin de Partie, Happy Days,* and *Comment c'est.*

Although Beckett's work has received a great deal of attention from critics, this attention has been concentrated on certain works, and in particular on *Waiting for Godot,* to the neglect of others. The volume *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien* has been perhaps the most unduly neglected of Beckett's published writings, having received close attention from only half-a-dozen critics. A survey of the extant commentaries will show that this study has considerable scope for original criticism.

Two pioneers in Beckett studies, Hugh Kenner and John Fletcher, both discuss the *Nouvelles.* Hugh Kenner's frequently illuminating remarks are scattered through *Samuel Beckett, a Critical Study* (1961,1968) and through
The Stoic Comedians (1964); neither work, however, offers a complete account of any one of the nouvelles, even though they receive almost as much attention as does the more important trilogy of novels. John Fletcher devotes a section of The Novels of Samuel Beckett (1964) to the Nouvelles, and refers to them from time to time both elsewhere in that work, and in Samuel Beckett's Art (1967).

Dr. Fletcher's treatment of the Nouvelles in The Novels of Samuel Beckett, chapter four, part one, established a pattern for subsequent discussions of this stage in Beckett's career. Following his example, later writers have taken the Nouvelles as an opportunity to guess at Beckett's reasons for changing to French in 1945; this is a topic well worth considering, but one which will not be discussed in this study. In both of his books Dr. Fletcher assesses Beckett's competence in his adopted language and he concludes that the revision of the nouvelles displays increased proficiency in using French.

On these works themselves Dr. Fletcher has little to say of value: he attempts a synopsis of each of the Nouvelles in turn, taking them out of order and then claiming that yet another order is the proper one. Although many points in his analyses are questionable, he has several valid general observations; for example, that the 'principal theme' is 'the theme of exile', that the style is 'a kind of bland literalness', and that the Nouvelles are 'in many ways an indispensable introduction' to the trilogy of novels. This study

1. p.106
2. p.104
3. p.110
will argue that in two general comments he is demonstrably wrong: in saying that the nouvelles reveal 'a profound contempt for the whole activity of telling stories',

Two bulky interpretations of Beckett's whole output include dutiful examinations of the Nouvelles. Michael Robinson, in *The Long Sonata of the Dead* (1969), chapter six, agrees with John Fletcher in reversing the order of the second and third nouvelles. He too ponders Beckett's reasons for turning to French, and thinks that the three nouvelles, when taken in his rearranged order, correspond to the three novels of the trilogy. 'Le Calmant', he writes, 'clearly anticipates the post-mortem monologue of *The Unnamable*. The hero is dead when it opens ...' Apart from these points there is little to disagree with in Robinson's brief treatment of the Nouvelles, which is mainly given over to summarising the plots.

The plots are 'difficult to summarize', as Ruby Cohn discovered, and she believes that they 'implicitly deride the orderly tradition of the well-made plot in French literature.' In Samuel Beckett, the comic gamut (1962), chapter five, Mrs. Cohn argues that the 'alogical immediacy of the stories' represents a conclusion that 'experience resists interpretation by intellect.' Mrs. Cohn assumes, from her confessed inability to interpret the nouvelles in any other way, that they are an 'ironic cosmological comedy'. Her discussion meditates on the incongruities and oddities

1. p.109
2. p.108
3. p.139
4. p.102
5. p.103
in the Nouvelles.

Finally, two specialist studies discuss this work. Geneviève Bonnefoi, in Les Lettres Nouvelles for 1956, devoted six pages to a sensitive review of Nouvelles et Textes pour rien. Mlle Bonnefoi, although she too gives an over-literal interpretation of the end in 'La Fin', touches on many of the themes in the Nouvelles and suggestively discusses the hero's character in general terms. Perhaps only Jean Onimus, in the section "Ontologie" du clochard of his Beckett in the series 'Les écrivains devant Dieu', has been able to extend Mlle Bonnefoi's discussion of the latter topic.

The other specialist study of the Nouvelles is Raymond Federman: Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (1965), chapter six. Referring in a footnote to the review by Geneviève Bonnefoi, Federman writes: 'Nouvelles et Textes pour rien has been greatly ignored by critics; this is one of the few articles devoted to this important Beckett work.' Federman's lengthy chapter on the Nouvelles is extremely vague; it makes few quotations from the stories themselves, and uses these simply as pegs for loose general theorising. In the Nouvelles, Federman writes, 'While the hero seemingly fabricates his own existence and the setting in which he performs, the fiction falls into an apparent state of irresponsibility and chaos.'

This essay, unlike former criticism, is based on a conviction that the Nouvelles, though difficult, are ordered and intelligible. It does not summarise or paraphrase the stories, but instead gives critical accounts

1. p.54
2. p.184, note 5
3. p.177
in which the more important aspects of the individual nouvelles are discussed in their order of appearance. The most frequently recurring topics are: the range of subject-matter; the incidence of satire; the attitude to story-telling; and the control of sympathy.

The findings of the separate chapters are brought together in the conclusion, which relates the Nouvelles to the rest of Beckett's work. Although many parallels with other works are indicated in the course of the essay, no attempt has been made here to list every possible cross-reference. The principal contribution of this study to an understanding of the particular work being considered is to be found in chapter three, which advances the first coherent interpretation of 'Le Calmant', and so greatly simplifies discussion of the Nouvelles as a whole.
Chapter 2. 'L'Expulsé'.

Beckett, as Hugh Kenner has pointed out, is a master of the declarative sentence. 'L'Expulsé' begins with a simple direct statement, 'Le perron n'était pas haut.'(11), which well exemplifies this skill, but which is also instinct with mystery. Although the meaning of this statement is obvious, its significance is undefined, and is in fact obscured by the following sentences. It is not until the third paragraph, with the statement 'La chute fut donc peu grave.'(13), that the relevance of the opening words is specified.

The delay in clarifying this mystery is not, however, gratuitous, but serves three important ends. Firstly, it accustoms the reader to the oddness of the narrator's concerns, and so introduces him directly to the strange world of the Nouvelles; the reader's feeling of bewilderment here helps to suspend the reactions which might normally be evoked by the story of an expulsion, and so prepares him for the unorthodox preoccupations in the remainder of this nouvelle and other two. The indirection in the writing forces the reader to an alertness which will be indispensable to understanding these works, in which participation as well as receptivity is needed.

Secondly, the obsessive attention to the problem of counting the steps establishes that the narrator is above all trustworthy; this attention to detail implies a reliability not always found in first-person narratives. Further, his willingness to admit certain shortcomings as a reporter of information reinforces

1. Samuel Beckett, p.91
his credibility, as is implied in this confession: 'Je ne savais par où commencer, ni par où finir, disons les choses comme elles sont.' (11) The careful specifications, such as 'Dans l'autre sens, je veux dire de haut en bas, ...', and the selection of the right word, as in '... c'était pareil, le mot n'est pas trop fort.' (11), both strengthen the reader's confidence in the narrator's worth as historian or chronicler.

Finally, the literal-mindedness of the story-teller in the nouvelle is a source of amusement; the precision of the narration hovers on the brink of pedantry, which is often comical in fiction. There is, too, an element of schoolmasterly self-importance underlying such dogmatic statements as the following: 'C'est tuant, les souvenirs. Alors il ne faut pas penser à certaines choses .... C'est un ordre.' (12) The seriousness and strangeness of these pronouncements cause the reader to reflect as well as to smile, and so confirm his judgment that the narrator, though peculiar, deserves a respectful attention.

The opening paragraph of 'L'Expulsé' serves also to focus attention on two subjects which recur often in Beckett's writing: number and memory. The pervasive significance of mathematics in Beckett's fiction has been discussed by several critics, and most notably by Hugh Kenner. ¹ Here it is appropriate merely to note that the hero's attitude to counting is similar to that of Molloy, who exclaims: 'Extraordinary how mathematics help you to know yourself.', ² and to that of Mr. Rooney, who exclaims: 'Not count! One of the few satisfactions

in life!'¹

The theory of memory so gnomically set out here is in accord with that expounded in Beckett's critical study of Proust, from whom it derives. 'The man with a good memory does not remember anything because he does not forget anything. His memory is ... an instrument of reference instead of an instrument of discovery.'² In 'L'Expulsé', instead of elaborating the discussion of 'this Janal, trinal, agile monster or Divinity: Time ...; Habit ...; Memory ....'³ Beckett images the theory in the metaphor of mud (12), which is a most important feature of his fictional universe, especially in Comment c'est.

If the first paragraph suggested that the narrator is perhaps an eccentric or worse, the second guarantees his good sense by affirming a sense of proportion. 'Après tout le nombre des marches ne fait rien à l'affaire. Ce qu'il fallait retenir, c'est le fait que le perron n'était pas haut, et cela je l'ai retenu.'(12) Further, a degree of sympathy is evoked by his reminiscences of childhood, and this is deepened when the reader learns, in the next paragraph, the hero's misfortune and his own reaction to it. By the end of this third paragraph the reader's interest is so thoroughly engaged in the hero's point-of-view that a qualified identification is achieved, and is to be exploited in various ways throughout the Nouvelles.

The two most notable aspects of the expulsion are that it is neither explained nor explicitly resented by the hero. The calmness with which the hero accepts

1. All that Fall, 1957, p.29
2. Proust, 1958, pp.29-30
3. Proust, p.35
this event is associated with a disposition to be
slothful, as seen in paragraph four (13-4). At this
point, the situation seems to be as follows: a ne'er-
do-well grown-up son has, by his indolence, so provoked
his parents that they fling him into the street, in the
hope that he will go away and support himself. In the
context of the whole nouvelle, however, the expulsion
from home is an image for expulsion from the womb; the
emergence of the hero in this way gives the story a
clearly fixed point of departure, without the tiresomely
protracted immaturity which usually renders children
unsuitable for major roles in fiction.

Once expelled, the hero, after meticulous reason-
ing, concludes that he will not be pursued or beaten,
and so makes no attempt to run away. Instead, he seats
himself on the pavement and proceeds to day-dream until
a disturbance recalls him to the outer world (13-4).
Raymond Federman believes that the hero adopts the
foetal posture while thinking, but the description is
not conclusive on this point; although the theme of a
return to the womb is basic to the nouvelle, and although
other characters in Beckett's work certainly do adopt
the foetal posture, it is possible that the hero is
here simply lying down. The theme of retreat into the
freedom of the inner world dominates many of Beckett's
early works, but especially Murphy, and has a lesser,
though still considerable, importance in the Nouvelles.

The hero's delightful fantasy of a pastoral land-
scape is interrupted by the return of his hat, which
prompts a keenly satirical account of the hat's purchase
and of bourgeois conformism in general. Before this,

1. p. 185
however, the satirist presents his credentials in being scrupulously fair to his persecutors: 'Ils étaient très corrects, selon leur Dieu.' (14) Before telling the story of the hat there is a moment's hesitation while the hero asks 'Comment décrire ce chapeau? Et pourquoi?' (14), calling in question the need to fill fiction with catalogues of things; this tradition and Beckett's variations on it are well discussed by Hugh Kenner in *The Stoic Comedians*. In this case, the hesitation reminds the reader that the narrative within the nouvelle is actually in process of composition; the significance of this fact is discussed in the conclusion to this study.

The hat itself has been discussed by Raymond Federman, whose treatment of this subject seems fanciful or, at best, ill-substantiated. In this context, the father's attitude to the hat is more important than the hat itself, and this attitude is exposed as a desire to strait-jacket and humiliate his son. The stupid harshness of fathers is a recurring motif in Beckett's work, and this example resembles the case of the martinet Moran, and his son, in the second part of *Molloy*. In 'L'Expulsé' the resentment of paternal authority is implied rather than expressed, so that the passivity of the victim throws the father's cruelty into strong relief, and obliges the reader to bring down his own judgment.

Before the paragraph ends with the reminder that the hat remains undescribed, the reader is made aware of two more of Beckett's preoccupations: the explanation of behaviour, and the concept of mind. On several occasions in the *Nouvelles* there is evidence given of


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remarkable insight into human motivation, as in this reference to mockery: 'Mais c'était peut-être de la gentillesse, genre celle qui raille le bossu sur son grand nez.' (15) In addition to hinting at the peculiarity of the hero's appearance, this sentence reminds the reader of his willingness, where possible, to take a charitable view of his fellow-men; this kindly outlook renders instances of bitterness all the more striking when they do occur.

The second concern, with the concept of mind, is introduced in the following way: 'J'ai toujours été étonné du peu de finesse de mes contemporains, moi dont l'âme se tortait du matin au soir, rien qu'à se chercher.' (15) The suggestions of an amusing preciosity in this remark prevents the quest for the soul from sounding dull, as does the striking verb 'se tordre'; a similar linking of ideas is found in Vladimir's stage-direction '(avec des tortillements d'esthète)'. 1 This reference to the soul as if it were a body is foreshadowed by the opening paragraph, in which memory is referred to as if it were a place, thanks to the insistent repetition of the phrases 'à la mémoire' and 'dans la mémoire' (11-2). The problem of the body-mind relationship, which bulks large in Murphy for example, is scarcely touched on in the Nouvelles, but does provide an explanation for a number of details to be mentioned later.

Although no description was given of the hat, there is a detailed description of the house from which the hero was expelled. The precision of this passage contrasts strongly with the hero's vagueness concerning his age at the time, and the fond admiration which he

1. En attendant Godot, London, 1966, p.34
feels for the house contrasts markedly with the brutal treatment which he has just received from its inhabitants. These contrasts establish the differences between the hero and his background, and imply alienation from the community's way of life even before the hero's desired way of life is specified. Moreover, the contrast between the hero's gently lyrical description of the smoke, on the one hand, and the furious cleaning operations going on in the house, on the other, strengthens the reader's sympathy for the hero, as does the poignant defence of 'Je ne leur avais pourtant rien fait.' (18)

The hero's calmness and passivity on being forcibly expelled prepares the reader for the statement: 'Je serais volontiers mort dans cette maison.' (17) Shortly after this, the hero's attitudes and sentiments are recorded more fully, revealing him as hypersensitive and even, perhaps, neurasthenic. The life of a recluse has left him altogether unfamiliar with the town in which he has always lived, (18-9) and his sense of being an alien is acute not merely in this place but almost everywhere on earth. Only in contemplating the sky, where the gaze is unobstructed and free to wander where it will, does the hero feel completely at ease. (18-9)

This section has indicated the range and profundity of Beckett's concerns; the most universal experience, that of being in the world, is treated here, movingly. Thanks to the hero's sympathetic persona, maintained by the mild self-mockery of 'La plaine dans la tête, j'allais à la lande.' (19) for example, the subject here has an impact which it seldom possesses either in philosophical discussion or in ordinary experience. If this topic has only an incidental relevance in 'L'Expulsé', where it is deliberately evaded for the most part, it
nevertheless underlies all three nouvelles and assumes major importance in 'Le Calmant' and 'La Fin'.

The validity of this passage is guaranteed by two qualities: the hero's discriminations, and his insight. The single word 'fameux' indicates that the hero does not look into the heavens for conventionally religious reasons. 'Mais d'abord je levai les yeux au ciel, d'où nous vient le fameux secours, ....'(18) he says, and the emphatic position of this tawdry adjective charges it with irony: the hero looks away from the confusion of this world and turns to the contemplation of the heavens, but it is not Christian faith which sustains him, even if it is said to succour other people. The implied dissent from popular religion is made explicit later in the nouvelle, and is part of a systematic discrimination of personal from institutional belief or opinion. The other quality, that of insight, is found in the remark that disappointment is often accompanied by a feeling of relief(19). Such keen perception of psychological states is, like the hero's intuition into the motives of other people, a sound reason for crediting his reported experiences.

In marked contrast with this section there now follows a comically grotesque description of the hero's peculiar gait, and a disgustingly detailed attempt at explaining its oddity. The hero, like Watt and other of Beckett's characters, finds it impossible to walk in a normal manner, and this is because his natural gait is odd, and because his mind has only imperfect control of his body. The body-mind problem here provides a source of comedy, since the body is described as an awkward machine and is consequently, as Bergson pointed out, ridiculous. The explanation here is that given by the
hero, who extends it to include an account of his childhood in which scatological details play an important part. The unashamed frankness of this long passage (20-1) reminds the reader forcefully of the extent to which the hero is alienated from social conventions, but suggests too a complete self-acceptance in which repression has no purpose.

The last sentence of this paragraph, 'Ratiocinons sans crainte, le brouillard tiendra bon.' (22), casts doubt on the value of explanations which refer to causes; the next paragraph proceeds to consider the evidence of effects. As a consequence of his strange gait, the hero is obviously not a part of the community which surrounds him. A respectable fear of inconveniencing strangers, and a witty criticism of a policeman's peremptoriness, restore the reader's sympathy with the hero (22), but only for a little while. There follows a virulent attack on children and on old ladies (22-3) which, while it may well shock, is nevertheless commendably frank.

It has already been remarked that the parent-child relationship is seldom if ever a happy one in Beckett's work. This truth about particular relationships holds good of the type itself; parenthood and birth are both abominable concepts in the opinion of this hero, and of other characters in both the novels and the plays. 'Tout le monde est parent, c'est cela qui vous interdit d'espérer.' (22-3) Only by comic exaggeration can a writer express the view that, since existence is suffering, procreation is a monstrous offence. By saying that to run over a child would be to perform a service for it, the hero shows himself as kindly rather than brutal, and as, himself, a victim rather than an aggressor.
That the hero thinks in these terms may be seen from his description of himself: "... comme si j'étais moi le victime, et je l'étais, mais je n'aurais pas pu le prouver." (23) In the Nouvelles, as in the trilogy of novels, the persecution of the heroes by the community is embodied in policemen. In his encounter with the (second) policeman in 'L'Expulsé', the hero speaks with extreme politeness: 'Désireriez-vous ... que je descende dans le ruisseau?' (24); far from resenting the officer's rudeness, the hero approves his opinion: 'C'était tout a fait mon sentiment.' (24) In this incident, the contrast with the crude impersonal 'behaviour of the policeman throws into relief the humanity of the hero.

The learned wit contained in the aside '... sans penser un seul instant a Héraclite ...' (24) is common in Beckett's writing, in which many of the characters recall fragments of a classical education. The humorous reference here reminds the reader that the concept of flux is the explanation for that disorder which the hero finds so intolerable in the world. Linked to this touch of erudition is the hero's fastidious criticism of popular religious observances: there is a lack of 'tenue' in these signs of the cross which, as the phrase '... si j'en étais réduit à me signer ....' (25) indicates, corresponds to a deficiency in the faithful themselves. Beckett's own pungent remarks on this subject, as reported by Tom F. Driver, happen to resemble the hero's opinions on this matter.¹

If, so far, the hero's life has appeared aimless, the passing of a funeral procession gives him an idea which is to dominate the rest of the nouvelle: the wish

to reverse the process of expulsion. At the literal level, this desire is for some accommodation, temporary or permanent, which will be a replacement for the home which the hero was compelled to leave. On the level of symbolism, the longing is for a return, if not to the womb itself, then at least to some substitute which will resemble it. The funeral provides a reminder of mortality, and of the suffering which is the human condition, while at the same time, offering, in the sight of the cabs, a means to obtain partial relief. The cab which the hero hires can be completely sealed from the outer world, and is so pleasing that the hero would like to buy it. (26)

The theme of 'L'Expulsé' closely resembles that of Murphy, in spite of the pronounced differences in style between the two works. Murphy, whose birth is referred to as 'the unhappy event', regards all life as 'a wandering to find home', and strives for 'that self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom.' In 'L'Expulsé', the hero's attitude to the cab is very similar to Murphy's deep admiration of the padded cells in the mental hospital; in both cases the comfortable enclosed space seems designed for a life free from physical, and devoted to mental, activity. The doctrine of the inner world, though it presumably underlies 'L'Expulsé', does not receive there an exposition comparable with that in Murphy, especially in the sixth section.

Complete freedom from physical exertion, although it may be purchased, is beyond the hero's means. In his

1. Murphy, New York, 1957, pp.23-4
2. Murphy, p.168
3. Murphy, p.181
discourse on the subject of money, the hero restores strangeness to this familiar matter by speaking as if the reader too were alienated from the way of life which it perpetuates, and so allows him to share the outsider's experience. The simple literal statements here are at once obviously true and richly suggestive: 'Le grand inconvenient de cet état, qu'on pourrait définir comme l'impossibilité absolue d'acheter, est qu'il vous oblige à vous remuer.' (28) The simplicity of this personal outlook is especially attractive, and so reinforces the sympathy between reader and hero. The idea that money may be an instrument of oppression is suggested by the scene in the lawyer's office; the abruptness of the lawyer's imperatives has a quality of menace, which is imaged in the heavy cylindrical ruler wielded by this powerful figure, as by the policeman in Molloy. 1 In Beckett's work, those characters who are closely identified with the community's way of life and with the possession of property, as are Pozzo and Moran, are frequently sadistic.

The cabman complains of his life, and so offers a contrast with the hero, who evokes but never solicits sympathy; the cabman is moreover explicit, and complains only about his particular experience of life, whereas the hero avoids direct statement, and regrets the very fact of life. The hero's attitudes are conveyed by occasional asides, such as 'Ah les morts.' (31), and by implication, as in the following passage: 'C'est donc grâce à cet agent que j'en avais encore un peu. Très peu. Divisé par ma vie à venir cela n'existait pas, à moins que mes prévisions ne péchassent par pessimisme.'

1. Molloy, p.28
(30) To understand this calculation requires an effort from the reader, who deduces that pessimism is here equated with anticipating a long life; paraphrase seems banal in this case, because easily assimilated, whereas the original statement, because it requires the reader to reflect in order to appreciate the point of view, is truly disturbing.

The hero's attitude to society is marked by apprehensiveness, because he cannot assume that he will be accepted by his fellow-men. The restaurant is a place which he is almost afraid to enter: 'J'aime autant être avec un habitué, dans ces endroits-là.' (31) The hero regards the cabman as a protective device rather than as a person, and does not even hope for a satisfying relationship; the smallest token of fellowship seems to him surprising and memorable: 'Il m'avait préféré à un enterrement, c'était un fait qui durerait éternellement.' (34) As the hero's encounter with the cabman's wife is to demonstrate (37), this timidity is well-grounded, for his appearance inspires loathing in those who meet him casually.

Unable to enjoy the company of his own kind, the hero feels an affinity with horses, and is happy to sleep in a stable. The heroes in Beckett's fiction frequently feel bound less to the human than to the animal world, and in particular to horses and to sheep, which often symbolise, respectively, the stoic and the victim. The ills which the human world inflicts on animals and on the hero are imaged in the suffering which the horse would experience if offered food while harnessed to the cab; the cabman ties the horse's jaws with a strap 'afin qu'il n'eût pas à pâtrir du bon coeur.
des passants.' (36) The incomprehension which separates these two worlds is a cause of distress to the hero, as to other characters in Beckett's work.

When, at the end of 'L'Expulsé', the hero leaves the cab and the stable, he is careful to return the cabman's matches. This small fact reminds the reader of the nouvelle's opening, when the hero's hat was carefully thrown after him from the house, and so binds the parts of the narrative together. It also reminds the reader of the charming passage in which the hero lights the lamps on the cab: "Il me donna sa boîte d'allumettes, j'ouvris la petite vitrè bombée montée sur charnières, j'allumai et je refermai aussitôt, pour que la mèche brûlât tranquille et claire, bien au chaud dans sa petite maison, à l'abri du vent." (35) The hero's identification with the world of things is perhaps even more touching than that with the world of animals, and is here kept from sentimentality by the steadying rhythm of the short, matter-of-fact, statement which follows: 'J'eus cette joie.' (35) The longing for security has been only temporarily satisfied when the nouvelle ends.

Two other features of the ending require comment: the imagery of light, and the question of story-telling. The hero, setting out at dawn, walks towards the rising sun, 'pour être éclairé au plus tôt.' (40) His further remark that he would have liked to see 'un horizon marin, ou désertique' links this passage with the that about the plain and the Lunebourg heath, through the connecting themes of freedom to wander and to gaze without obstruction. The light has, however, a variety of significances, as in the following passage: 'La courte journée d'hiver tirait vers sa fin. Il me semble quelquefois que ce sont là les seules journées que j'ai connues,
et surtout ce moment charmant entre tous, celui qui en précède l'oblitération nocturne.'(33) Although dawn is not associated by the hero with the dawn of life, dusk is for him associated with the death-wish: 'Quand je suis dehors, le matin, je vais à la rencontre du soleil, et le soir, quand je suis dehors, je le suis, et jusque chez les morts.'(40) The imagery of light and the subject of death, both touched on here, assume great importance in the other two nouvelles.

The other feature of the ending, the question of story-telling, is similarly more important in 'Le Calmant' and 'La Fin' than in 'L'Expulsé', and is discussed in the conclusion to this study. The hero's views on the subject in this nouvelle are comparatively undeveloped. No reason is given for the telling of stories, and the hero admits 'Je ne sais pas pourquoi j'ai raconté cette histoire.'(40), but one reason is perhaps to affirm his existence and his identity; this is to become the major theme of 'Le Calmant'. Furthermore, the last sentence, by insisting on the universal or archetypal meaning of this narrative, relates the hero, as nothing else can, to the world of men. In the statements 'J'aurais pu tout aussi bien en raconter une autre histoire. Peut-être qu'une autre fois je pourrai en raconter une autre.'(40) John Fletcher sees a contempt for the compulsion to tell stories.¹ The sense is, rather, that there is a certain, strange, pleasure in telling an 'histoire' or chronicle, and that the hero may perhaps explore this on a future occasion. This he does, and the results will be examined in the following chapters.

¹. The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p.109
Chapter 3. 'Le Calmant'.

The difficulty of 'Le Calmant' is readily apparent in the first paragraph, and even in the first sentence. The major problem of how to interpret the statement 'Je ne sais plus quand je suis mort.' (41) is, however, less formidable in the context of the whole nouvelle than in this paragraph alone. The death, as Ruby Cohn has pointed out, is not 'la vraie mort charnelle' (60); it must be some other kind of death. The simplest solution is to assume that this is an old man, lying in bed, and trying to remind himself that he is still a person and is still really alive, although his sense of identity has weakened so much that he feels he must be dead. On this view, the story is related from this side of the grave, and not from l'outre-tombe as John Fletcher believes, so that the decomposition here referred to is that of an ageing body rather than of a rotting corpse.

This interpretation may appear to have oversimplified the issues in question, but only because it is a reading of this paragraph in the perspective of the whole nouvelle. The bewilderment which the reader feels on first attempting 'Le Calmant' is an important part of its effect, for this is the experience of the old man when he begins to relate his tale. It is essential to remember that this nouvelle has two levels, which, though they may be thought of as distinct, do nevertheless interact. The more obvious level is that of the narrative, but there is too the level of the narrator's life while telling his tale. There are,

1. Samuel Beckett, the comic gamut, 1962, p.108
2. The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p.108
as implied already, two distinct time-schemes here
synchronised.

The situation of the hero in this second nouvelle
is similar to that of the hero in the second novel of
the trilogy. In Malone dies, an old man occupies his
last hours of life in telling a beautifully-shaped
story whose violent climax is precisely timed to coincide
with his own death, which is partly caused by the
excitement of this fiction; in this way the story of
his life, that is to say, of his dying hours, and the
story which he tells while dying, come to an end at
the same moment. In framing the novel so that art and
life interact, Beckett has created a work which may be
compared with To the Lighthouse, for example.

In addition to resembling Malone dies, 'Le Calmant'
shares certain characteristics of the earlier novel
Watt. No summary can possibly indicate the complexities
of Watt's construction, but there is nevertheless a
simple basic plan to the novel. Watt has resemblances
to the literary kind known as the test-story, which is
discussed by J.A. Burrow in A Reading of Sir Gawain and
the Green Knight. ¹ Watt journeys from the comparative
security of the town into the strange and terrifying
domain of Knott, and returns chastened by the venture.
This outline, besides showing Watt's similarities to
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, is intended as an
introduction to the mediating link between the two
levels of 'Le Calmant': the story of Joe Breem or Breen.

The story of Joe Breem or Breen was a bed-time
story which the narrator's father used to read to him

¹. 1965, pp.160-71
each night, from a picture-book, until he went to sleep; (46-7) the title 'Le Calmant' refers as much to this story, which was in effect a kind of lullaby, as to 'la fiole'(67-9). Even as a boy the narrator identified himself, as he reveals in mentioning '... les images, qui étaient moi déjà, ...'(47), with the strong, muscular, youth who swam for miles, a knife between his teeth, in pursuit of a shark. Now, as an old man, the narrator decides to relive in imagination the pattern of this conte: 'A moi maintenant le départ, la lutte et le retour peut-être, à ce vieillard qui est moi ce soir, plus vieux que ne le fut jamais mon père, plus vieux que je ne le serai jamais.'(47) The complicated problem of the narrator's age is most satisfactorily explained as follows: this man, having probably, like Malone, lost count of his real age, thinks of himself as a very old man and yet is conscious that in making this assumption he may be overestimating his age. On the last page of the nouvelle the sentence 'Heureusement qu'il ne m'attendait pas, le pauvre père Breem, ou Breen.'(75) indicates that the narrator will not be able to complete the last phase of his tale: the calmative has had its desired effect, as suggested by the parenthetical phrase 'trop fatigué pour chercher le mot juste,'(74), and the narrator falls asleep. Because 'Le Calmant' is the story of this tale, the narrator simply falls asleep, leaving the reader to deduce what has happened from the situation and from the somewhat abrupt ending.

It is not, however, the story of Joe Breem or Breen which the narrator relates in order to calm himself, but an anecdote from his own life. Like 'L'Expulsé', this nouvelle is a story about an old man
who tells not a conte but an histoire, which is a true story or anecdote. In addition to having the shape provided by its literary model, the story of Joe Breem or Breen, this story has the wholeness of truth: the incident referred to at the end (73-5) may well be that referred to at the beginning, before the inner story had begun (41). The narrator chooses to relate an incident from his own life not simply 'pour essayer de [se] calmer' (42) but, by means of reliving his experiences and especially his sufferings, to convince himself that he can be affected by experiences other than direct sense-data, and is therefore still alive as a person. In this way the doubts of the opening paragraph are resolved.

In view of the complicated framework outlined here, it is remarkable that this nouvelle was ever conceived, and still more a cause of wonder that it was fully written down. It is an exceptionally difficult piece of writing, even by the standard of Beckett's other works. Former critics have thought 'Le Calmant' amorphous, but it suffers in fact from too much, rather than too little, structuring. One of the problems encountered in writing this story is seen in the narrator's discussion of tenses; the synchronisation of the two time-schemes means that neither past nor present tense is alone appropriate to his relation. 'Je mènerai néanmoins mon histoire au passé, comme s'il s'agissait d'un mythe ou d'une fable ancienne,' the narrator says, solving the problem in the best possible manner, 'car il me faut ce soir un autre âge, que devienne un autre âge celui où je devins ce que je fus. Ah je vous en foutrai des temps, salauds de votre temps.'(43-4) This obscenity expresses exasperation with the near-inadequacy of language for the task in hand.
Before he can begin his relation, the narrator has a moment's hesitation caused by doubts on the status of his imaginative reliving of the past: 'Où se peut-il que dans cette histoire je sois remonté sur terre, après ma mort.' This anxiety can be understood only in terms of the interpretation outlined above: this anecdote is intended to convince the narrator that he is really not dead, so that the possibility that his imaginative experience may be a posthumous, because purely spiritual, existence, is a serious objection to the whole endeavour. The difficulty here cannot be completely removed, but the doubt is countered by the firm assertion: 'Non, cela ne me ressemble pas, de remonter sur terre, après ma mort.' (42) The particular identity of the hero is not in question here, though it is, and becomes an important subject, in the trilogy of novels. The basic problem for the narrator within this nouvelle is not the question what his own character might be, but the question whether or not he has any existence in the outer world, that is, in the world of other people.

Once his hesitation has been overcome, the narrator settles down to the business of telling his histoire. His first practical problem is that of impelling himself, as the hero of the inner story, to overcome his characteristic laziness so as to venture from seclusion into the town. The motive of assuring himself of his own existence is, in the case of the hero in his own anecdote, either not conscious or not strong enough to produce the necessary movement, and so several motives are suggested: 'Me jetait-on dehors?' (42), which was the initial fact in 'L'Expulsé', and, later, 'Avais-je seulement faim? Le temps me tentait-il?' Since these possible motives are all rejected, it is likely that the basic motive is,
whether or not understood at the time, sufficient to activate the hero. The problem of motivation is here solved in a conventional way, as in the first part of Molloy, rather than, for example, by recourse to such mysterious agencies as Gaber and Youdi, which serve a similar purpose in the second part of Molloy.

Even when the inner story has begun, a certain infirmity of purpose lingers on: 'Je ne connais que la ville de mon enfance, j'ai dû voir l'autre, mais sans pouvoir y croire.' (43) The reference here is possibly to the Christian concept of a heavenly city, which the hero might suppose he had seen, assuming that he had died. The persistence of this belief that he may be dead, and its subversive effect, are noted with implied regret in the narrator's immediate observation: 'Tout ce que je dis s'annule, je n'aurai rien dit.' (43) Once the story is well under way, however, this doubt is forgotten, and before long the narrator-hero is speaking of death in a manner which does not commit itself on the question of whether or not he is already dead: 'Mourir sans trop de douleur, un peu, cela en vaut la peine, ....' (44)

There is, in this discussion of the best way to die, a recurrence of the death-wish, which grows more and more prominent in the course of the three nouvelles. The hope here is for a death that will be final, and not the beginning of any life after death; a Christian view of immortality is brushed aside by atheism, as in the phrase 'le ciel aveugle' (44), and by ridicule, as in the phrase '... ce jour plus pâle, gage de je ne sais quelle sotte éternité.' (44) The longing for death is imaged powerfully in the following sentence: 'Mais c'est à moi ce soir que doit arriver quelque chose, à mon corps, comme dans les mythes et métamorphoses, à ce vieux corps...'
auquel rien n'est jamais arrivé, ou si peu, qui n'a jamais rien rencontré, rien aimé, rien voulu, dans son univers étamé, mal étamé, rien voulu sinon que les glaces s'écroulent, les planes, les courbes, les grossissantes, les rapetissantes, et qu'il disparaîsse, dans le fracas de ses images.' (46) The anguish here seems to be caused by the fact that, because the univers is 'mal étamé', man is not satisfied by the temptation to think of himself as a microcosm in a total plan, and merely experiences the feelings of bewilderment and alienation.

The passage quoted above owes its great force to originality of expression, and the dissent from religious belief, discussed above, implies a discrimination issuing in independence of outlook. It is perhaps rather odd, in view of these qualities of independence and originality in 'Le Calmant', to find that the nouvelle contains several conventional references borrowed from Christian tradition: for example, '... les premières chauves-souris qui sont comme des crucifiées volantes ...' (48) These references seem, however, to receive less than half-hearted assent from the narrator, who slips into using them because they are familiar rather than meaningful. Typically, moreover, these allusions are reminders of mortality, and so are consistent with the character of the hero, who is preoccupied with death.

The clothes and appearance of the hero, as described here, place him unmistakably in the class of Beckett's comic tramps. In spite of his alienation from ordinary society, however, the hero retains some understanding of conventional ways of life, as is seen in the following observation: 'Mais leurs vitrines restaient illuminées, dans le but sans doute d'attirer le client et de lui faire dire, Tiens, c'est beau ça, et pas cher, je
repasserai demain, si je vis encore. ' (48) The techniques of display and advertising, and the kind of behaviour which the condition in people, are here neatly and so wittily noted: the last four words, however, remind the reader that the concern of the Nouvelles not primarily social satire, but is an exploration of larger issues.

These profound issues are, as has been pointed out already, sometimes treated by means of evasion, as in the search for some kind of palliative in 'L'Expulsé'. In the inner story of 'Le Calmant' there is an occasional wish to adopt the easy solution of not facing the issues squarely. The comparative superficiality of the following passage is readily apparent: 'Et je pourrais peut-être me glisser à bord d'un cargo en partance, inaperçu, et partir loin, et passer au loin quelques bons mois, peut-être même une année ou deux, au soleil, en paix, avant de mourir. ' (50) The most that can be said in favour of this commonplace wish is that it is a rare lapse from the concentrated individuality which gives the Nouvelles, and indeed almost all of Beckett's works, their value.

More characteristic of Beckett's power are the narrator's further reflections while at the harbour. 'Je n'avais qu'à baisser la tête et à regarder à terre sous mes pieds, car c'est dans cette attitude que j'ai toujours puisé la force de, comment dire, je ne sais pas, et c'est de la terre plutôt que du ciel, pourtant mieux coté, que m'est venu le secours, dans les instants difficiles. ' (51-2) The incompleteness of expression forces the reader to supply some verb such as 'continuer', and reminds him of its absurdity. The rejection of heaven as a means of support leads to the forceful image of suffering as a storm: 'Et là, sur la dalle, que je ne fixais pas, car pourquoi le fixer, je vis le havre au loin, au plus
périlleux de cette houle noire, et tout autour de moi la tempête et la pérdition.'(52) The concept of 'la pérdition' derives part of its force here from Christian theology, and shows the usefulness of religion even to a writer, like the narrator, who cannot accept its positive teachings. The metaphor of the storm belongs on the level of universal or archetypal significance so often found in Beckett's writing.

It has been argued above that the hero ventures out in order to face the ordeal of meeting other people and so putting to the test his own existence as a person; these encounters with strangers must now be considered. In the meeting with the boy and his goat, the hero responds warmly to his experience, but is not fully satisfied. There is no need here to assume that the hero is a homosexual; his sympathy, in the lovingly detailed descriptions of the boy, is extended not to an object of sexual desire but to a fellow sufferer, 'un petit malheureux, a l'orée de la vie.'(54) This keen sympathy is extended, too, to the goat, with no suggestion of sexual attraction, and for similar reasons: 'Pauvres chères bêtes, vous m'aurez aidé.'(55) Because the pity expressed is for others, rather than directly for himself, it enlists the reader's sympathy for the narrator.

The boy offers the hero a sweet, which he accepts, and the goat leaves behind it some droppings, which he examines when both have gone away. The boy does not, however, address a single word to the hero, even after the hero has managed to utter a question. In the first act of En attendant Godot, Vladimir says to the boy, who also looks after goats: 'Dis-lui ... (Il hésite.) Dis-lui que tu nous a vus. (Un temps.) Tu nous a bien vus,
n'est-ce pas?', and the boy replies 'Oui Monsieur.'

In the second act, a similar encounter is less satisfactory: the boy does not recognize him, and, though they converse, disappears without agreeing that he has seen Vladimir. In 'Le Calmant', the meeting is not so tense, and is even less conclusive. The narrator, while telling this part of his histoire, enters into the imaginative experience to the extent of confusing the two time-schemes, and then checks himself: 'Je dis ce soir, comme si c'était toujours le même soir, mais y a-t-il deux soirs?'(55) Although he identifies himself with the hero of his anecdote, he has yet to be identified by another person, and therefore the narrative must go on.

The mood of the story now changes to one of near-desperation. Unable to find anyone else in the town, the hero seeks refuge in a large church or cathedral, but this too is deserted; when the organ suddenly begins to play, he runs and finds himself not in the street again but high on the tower (56-7). The rapid, ill-considered, movements of the hero correspond to extreme agitation of mind, which makes him act 'comme celui que serre de près un maniaque homicide.'(57) Although it would be normal for anyone else to run away from a murderer, the hero later expresses a wish to be killed: 'Comme j'aimerais le précipiter, ou qu'il me précipite, en bas.'(58) This desire implies an extremely tormented state of mind, as does the reference to 'un garde-fou cynique'(57); the reader assumes that this part of the parapet is, in the hero's opinion, ironically named because, while claiming to protect the madman, it actually invites him to commit suicide.

1. p.46
2. p.86
The hero sees, on the parapet, the man referred to already, and another man, who is accompanied by a little girl. Both men look at him, but with expressions of hatred, and neither speaks to him or takes him for a person; to them he is merely a repulsive object. He himself, in his overwrought state, is haunted by details of these men's appearance, such as a hand or a checked cap. 'Quelle est cette horreur choseque où je me suis fourré?'(58), he asks. Only the sight of the horizon, where mountain and sea and plain meet the sky, is able to calm him at this moment; at least, the reader assumes that it calms him, as it does in 'L'Expulsé' and 'La Fin', although the only indication here is the word 'Assez.'(59) following the description and preceding a passage set once again in the street. The pivotal word 'Assez.' is an example of Beckett's tendency, pointed out by John Fletcher,\(^1\) to suppress explanatory transitional passages. More importantly, this single word illustrates Beckett's method, even in first-person narrative, of expressing motives and feelings through dramatic presentation.

Subsequently, in the inner story, the hero sees a number of people in the street, including a cyclist (62), who is described with all of the loving attention to detail which was bestowed on the boy and his goat. When the boy and his goat were disappearing from view, the narrator described them as follows: 'Bientôt ils ne furent plus qu'une petite masse sans détails et que non prévenu j'aurais pu prendre pour un jeune centaure.'(55) The reference here becomes the title, 'The Cartesian Centaur', of the essay in which Hugh Kenner describes the cyclist as a 'self-sufficient image of felicity'.\(^2\)

1. The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p.106
Both the boy with his goat and the cyclist with his machine seem, to the hero, to have achieved the perfect interaction or relationship between mind and matter, or between body and soul. The hero is for a long time so uncertain of his own existence, either in body or in soul, that he records as evidence the fact that his body casts a shadow and is therefore opaque. (63)

The observation of the cyclist is followed by a moment's generalisation: 'Tous allaient dans le même sens que moi, les véhicules aussi, je viens seulement de le réaliser.' (62) Here the word 'sens' has the meaning of 'direction', but in a figurative sense, rather than in the simply literal one which is found in the first paragraph of 'L'Expulsé' (11), for example; as Mrs. Rooney notes in All that Fall, we are all going in the same direction,¹ that is, to the grave. The oddness of life and mortality is in 'La Fin' obliquely expressed in the same terms: 'Le fleuve notamment me donnait l'impression, comme toujours, de couler dans le mauvais sens.' (85) It is, more than anything else, 'le sens de la vie' which is the source of wonder and perplexity in the two quotations from the Nouvelles.

The opportunity to test his existence in another encounter with a stranger is eagerly seized, and the hero advances to ask for the time, or for a light, but is ignored as if he did not exist. 'J'aurais pu tout aussi bien ne pas exister.' (64), he says, and the stock phrase, restored here to its full meaning, restates the basis of the story; a similar use of an ordinary word in an unfamiliar way is seen in the phrase 'Vu mon besoin d'assistance ....' (64), in which the word 'assistance'

¹ p.13
means not only 'help' but, with key significance in the hero's quest, 'audience' or 'witness'. A moment of great tension, when the hero is rebuffed, is followed by a moment of weariness or even near-despair, and then, as twice in En attendant Godot, by the sudden appearance of ground for hope. Like the cabman in 'L'Expulsé', the distinctly unlikeable stranger in 'Le Calmant' makes conversation, and generalises, as the hero does not, about his life. Soon the hero recovers his composure and takes pride in posing a finely-turned question(66). Before very long, reassured of his own existence, the hero is tired of the discussion and longs to return to his old resting-place in the country(67), but the encounter, as in other test-stories, takes a form somewhat different from that expected by the principal character.

Like Webster in T.S. Eliot's description, the hero is 'much possessed by death', and tries to see 'the skull beneath the skin': 'Le visage n'était pas gras, mais j'eus beau le regarder, il restait vêtu de ses chairs, au lieu de devenir tout crayeux et comme travaillé à la gouge.' (67) The stranger asserts, only too painfully for the hero, his independent existence and his personal force; the hero's inability to see this man as he usually sees people leads to a passage of great tension, consisting in a struggle for mastery in this encounter. The menace latent in all human intercourse is here imaged in the stranger's grasp on the hero's nape: 'Entre cette voix caressante et les doigts qui me labouraient le cou le contraste était saisissant.'(68) When this protracted struggle is brought to an end by the horrible device of a kiss, the setting becomes a further image of unmerited suffering: this scene takes place before 'une l. pp.43, 85
boucherie chevaline'(70), such as is found in Molloy also.

The resolution of the hero's doubts about his existence, and his release from the company of this overbearing stranger, produce an experience of transcendent peace. The hero hears a strange whispering noise, and has a vision of the street as 'une ravissante cascade de tons lavés, une énorme masse de fleurs éclatantes.'(73) When he collapses, there is, as noted already, a suggestion that this is the incident referred to in the frame-story at the beginning of the nouvelle. The inner story is so moving that by now the reader scarcely thinks at all in conventional ways; when the hero kneels, then lies flat, on the pavement, it is from his point-of-view that the reader shares this experience, while largely ignoring the social situation and the conventional values which are embodied in the passers-by(74). The mood at the end of the nouvelle is one in which the world, like the paving-stones, can be described as friendly or, at least, neutral(74); calm has been restored.

This calm reminds the reader of the title and of the two levels of the nouvelle, as did the narrator's occasional interruptions in the course of the inner story; two of these interruptions require comment. The following passage is a statement of the narrator's feeling that he is achieving little in this story: 'Car ce soir je n'ai rien à perdre, que je puisse distinguer. Et si je suis arrivé au point où j'en suis (de mon histoire) sans qu'il y ait rien de changé, ... il n'en reste pas moins que j'y suis arrivé, et c'est déjà quelque chose, et qu'il n'y a rien de changé, et c'est toujours ça. Ce n'est pas une raison pour brusquer les choses. Non, il faut cesser doucement ....'(68-9) Beckett's own view of writing is similar to this very modest statement; he works, as he
told Israel Shenker, with 'impotence, ignorance.' ¹ As he insisted in 'Three Dialogues', 'there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.' ² 'Le Calmant' is valuable not so much for its view of man and the universe as for its very pleasing shape.

The other passage which draws attention to itself establishes the important point that the narrator is actually in process of telling this histoire, and that it is certainly not a dream: 'Comment dire la suite? Mais c'est la fin. Où est-ce que j'ai rêvé, est-ce que je rêve? Non, non, pas de ça, voilà ce que je réponds, car le rêve n'est rien, une rigolade. Et avec ça significatif!' (70-1) The narrator knows that this is not a dream because dreams are significant of something; he implies that, in keeping with the views summarized above, this story does not mean anything. The other criterion which distinguishes the inner story from a dream is that of purpose; a dream is 'une rigolade', but telling stories is, for Beckett's characters, a deliberate and concentrated effort.

It is because 'Le Calmant' is so carefully structured, and because the inner story is clearly distinguished from a dream, that criticism should avoid using such words as 'nightmarish' to describe its effect; this comparison is at best confusing. Perhaps the best analogue for certain effects of 'Le Calmant' is to be found, not as Ruby Cohn suggests in literary Surrealism, ³ but in Surrealist painting. In this nouvelle, there are

1. New York Times, 6th May 1956, p.3 of section 2
2. In Samuel Beckett, ed. Martin Esslin, p.17
3. Samuel Beckett, the comic gamut, p.103
at least two features comparable with the work of well-known Surrealist painters: the precise and excessive observation of detail, especially of individual hands and eyes, is a recurring obsession of Salvador Dali, and the brilliantly illuminated empty street is a hallmark of de Chirico's work. The stylisation in each of these cases presupposes an extraordinary and unrestrained sensitivity in the observer.

Whereas Surrealist paintings are usually static, 'Le Calmant' has also a number of descriptions of movement, which are characteristicly strange. Once in the town, the hero, who is far from being in control of his body, moves at great speed, and notices several other people doing so. A young woman is described as hurrying across the road 'comme un lapin'(62), and this simile reminds the reader of an earlier simile from the scene in the cathedral: 'On se cachait peut-être sous les stalles du choeur ou en tournant autour des colonnes, comme les piverts.'(57) Ruby Cohn, in discussing the Nouvelles, notes that animals are often mentioned but that they do not seem to belong to a beast-fable.¹ In the case of the examples quoted here her comment is valid; in the case of the goat, and of the horses being slaughtered, however, it seems appropriate to regard the animals as comparable to man, and as exemplars of suffering, fortitude, and so on, in this and in the other nouvelles.

It is partly because this nouvelle is comparable with Surrealist paintings that Hugh Kenner's summary of 'Le Calmant' is inadequate: 'A man on a "bed of terror" lulls himself with the vivid chronicle of a journey perhaps never taken, when a solitary cyclist rolled

¹ Samuel Beckett, the comic gamut, p.105
down an eerie street, reading a newspaper in dead of night.\textsuperscript{1} To describe the chronicle merely as 'vivid' does not explain how it can, and does, 'lull' the man in question. The raison d'être for this histoire is to be found in the following reflection by Proust: 'Peut-être faut-il que les êtres soient capables de vous faire beaucoup souffrir pour que, dans les heures de rémission, ils vous procurent ce même calme apaisant que la nature.'\textsuperscript{2} The pattern of this story, like the tri-partite pattern of sonata form, achieves order by exploiting tension, as the narrator himself indicates: 'Dire que j'en fus angoissé, non, mais je le dis néan­moins, dans l'espoir de me calmer.'(61) The paradox here, as in the technique of relaxing a muscle by first contracting it tightly, is the motive from which the narrator in this nouvelle tells his histoire, and is the source for both the structure and the impact of 'Le Calmant'.

2. La Prisonnière, Paris, 1954, p.76
Chapter 4. 'La Fin'.

In the third of the Nouvelles, the hero's observation of the social background to his life is reliable, as in 'L'Expulsé', rather than distorted by his own state of mind, as in 'Le Calmant'. The opening pages reveal a further similarity with 'L'Expulsé', for this nouvelle too begins with an expulsion; the hero is expelled, not from his home, but from an unnamed institution, which may care for the sick, the insane, or the needy. By creating a reliable and sympathetic hero, as in first of the Nouvelles, Beckett has a point-of-view from which to write mordant satire of this charitable organisation, which is revealed as a means to the systematic practice of cruelty.

The hero's dealings with this institution are completely impersonal. For his part, he is attracted only to the objects in the establishment, and makes no reference to acquaintances or to true benefactors: 'Je voyais les objets familiers, compagnons de tant d'heures supportables.' (80) The administrators of this charity are referred to consistently as 'ils', which is at once more personal and yet more distant than the neutral 'on'. The treatment which these strange beings inflict on the hero is consistent with the force of this pronoun: they subject him to a series of humiliating indignities, and so demonstrate an attitude which is contemptuous rather than benevolent.

Charity, like the law, is a recurring topic in Beckett's writing, and is, like the law, unremittingly satirised. As Molloy remarks, with reference to an offer of unpalatable food which he was obliged to accept: 'Against the charitable gesture there is no defence,
that I know of.¹ The hero's own clothes are burnt, and he is given a foul-smelling set which belonged to a man now dead. He is treated as something less than alive, less than human (77-8); in order to expel him, they forcibly dress him with less ceremony than they would use in wrapping a parcel (79). The tone of this opening section is one of particularly grim comedy.

The hero implicitly recognises brutality in the treatment which he receives, and resents it. The feeling of powerlessness in the face of an authoritarian regime is imaged in the futile action of kicking a chair (80) by which the hero expresses disgust at the premature removal of his bed. The organisation's ambivalent aim is to return its beneficiaries to the outside world to fend for themselves, although it could well afford to cater for the hero's minimal needs if it were truly charitable. The dreadful nature of this system is set out in the hero's conversation with the official (80-2); the name 'Weir' which this official admits to, at the end of the interview, is a summing-up of the satire on charity. Ruby Cohn has indicated a little of this name's effect by relating it to the adjective 'weird' and to other words²; more important is the shuddering sound of this foreign name in its context and emphatic position.

In this opening section there is a marked contrast between the agent and the patient, that is, between the callous institution on the one hand, and the suffering hero on the other. Outside the institution the contrast is modified somewhat, for the hero is now characterised as a gentle contemplative, while other people are cruel.

1. Molloy, p. 30
2. Samuel Beckett, the comic gamut, p. 104
automata. In each of the second and third paragraphs, the hero's reflections as he gazes at the dim sun are interrupted by the antipathetic behaviour of other people. The crude question 'Vous désirez?' earns the sarcastic comment 'Très gentil.' (82); in the second incident, the harsh obscenity of the mother's reply to her child needs no comment at all (83). It is very largely by means of this contrasting background that the hero is characterised; his personality is in every respect different from that of these other people.

The hero's attitudes amount to an alienation not merely from the community around him but from the whole of the universe as he knows it. Although he can recognise the seasons, tell the time by the sun, and use the stars as compass-points, the hero feels profoundly ill at ease in the universe. The first intimation of this unease in 'La Fin' is to be found in the description of the town (84-5), which appears both changed and unchanged. In the image of the river (85) the hero, like Heraclitus, conceives the idea of flux as the only constant in experience.

The hero's sense of alienation is presented not only through his description of places, but also through his sympathies and desires. Sympathy for the horses which he hears drinking is a sympathy for mute fellow-sufferers (85-6); desire for a secluded resting-place (86) implies that exposure to the world is inherently painful. The description, later in the nouvelle, (96-7) of the countryside, which appears changed and also unchanged, reinforces the sense of alienation. Although this important theme is never treated with levity, it is expressed on occasion by means of sardonic humour: as Mrs. Rooney, in All that Fall, exclaims amusingly
'What a planet!'¹, so too the hero, towards the end of 'La Fin', ponders: 'C'est à se demander parfois si on est sur la bonne planète.' (118) Because the hero's attitude is more complex than mere bewilderment, the nouvelle has a variety and subtlety which retain the reader's interest.

One of the hero's few adaptations to his environment is his pursuit of expertise in various occupations. While looking for accommodation, he prides himself on maintaining a high standard of politeness without ever uncovering his head (87). This rigorous application of intelligence to a small problem of etiquette has, in its disproportion, a comic effect which strengthens the bond between reader and hero. The extreme deference which the hero shows towards other people is partly an attempt to overcome the disadvantage of his ridiculous appearance, and also, in its mechanical artificiality, further evidence of his alienation from the community's way of life.

Once installed in his basement, with the Greek or Turkish landlady to look after him, the hero seems almost to have achieved the ideal sought in 'L'Expulsé'. The contentment which an extremely simple way of life brings him implies that more conventional ways of life are absurd. The possibility that the treatment of this period in the hero's life might be sentimental is avoided by reference to certain of his bizarre attitudes: the company of rats does not upset him (89), and nor does the presence of his own urine in a flower-pot (91). The crocus reminds the reader of the geraniums in 'L'Expulsé', and characterises the hero as a man to whom only the

¹. All that Fall, p.21
simpler forms of life, such as plants and animals, offer any relief from his solitude. The humans referred to at this period are all causes of distress.

The hero's life is troubled by a collection of people who seem to represent the whole of mankind by their variety of age, sex, and occupation. The sounds of men or boys shouting and of a child singing disturb the hero's peace of mind (91-2); the casual visits of a little girl lead to suspicion, presumably that he is guilty of some sexual offence, and to visits from a policeman and a priest. The hero is willing, throughout these afflictions, to take a favourable view of his fellow men when possible, and twice says that his visitors were perhaps good men (92, 92-3). The ultimate treachery is his landlady's defection, which leaves him penniless at the mercy of the owner of the house (93-4).

The danger that this section of the nouvelle might appear, because of its sharp contrasts, melodramatic is avoided by the subtleties introduced into characterisation both of the hero and of the owner. The latter expels the former in order to accommodate his pig, but the inhumanity of this act is slightly off-set by his genuine concern for the animal's welfare. Conversely, the hero's laments are made less moving by his attempt to exploit the owner's pity: 'Je suis malade, dis-je, je ne peux pas partir comme ça sans préavis. Vous n'êtes pas si malade que ça, dit-il.' (94) This exchange, in addition to exposing the hero's self-pity, reminds the reader of a similar exchange at the institution: 'Je suis si vieux, dis-je. Vous n'êtes pas si vieux que ça, dit-il.' (82) The later echo of this passage links together the two scenes of expulsion in this nouvelle, and brings to an end the first part of 'La Fin'.

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The last section of the nouvelle, which consists of the two final paragraphs, resembles the first in including a wealth of closely observed detail and a social setting. By contrast, the middle section of 'La Fin', which traces the hero's wanderings in the country and by the sea, seems to be a different kind of writing; as in the case of allegory, understanding here relies on a special kind of interpretation. The hero's movements are directed by a concern for his mental rather than his physical well-being, and his motives lift the work from a comparatively literal to a more metaphorical plane. The increased resonance in the narrative gives its incidental significances a certain elusive quality, and the reader has a sense that the nouvelle possesses an archetypal or universal meaning which must defy paraphrase.

The hero's meeting with his son, like the reference much later to the town planner (105), seems to resemble the outer parts of the nouvelle rather than the body of this section. The attitude of loathing with which parents are usually mentioned in Beckett's work is here transferred to a child, and is intensified by the alienated hero's contempt for the community's way of life; the briefcase which the son carries is a token of his integration into society, so that the servility which the father needs to practise is reprehensible in the son, because unnecessary. The satirical description and the tone of hatred give the account of this incident (97) a more precisely defined character than is found in the succeeding passage.

The old man with his donkey, leading a life of extreme simplicity, seems to be an ideal figure capable of sustaining interpretation as a symbol. John Fletcher is reminded by the old man with his donkey of the
Galilean; they might with equal justification be related to the world of The Tempest. Here, for the first time in the Nouvelles, is a character who is completely admirable and sympathetic, and who therefore exposes certain shortcomings in the hero. The patient labours of this old man, and the faithful services of his donkey, give them a life which is, though difficult, satisfactory, and they are content together. Later in the nouvelle the hero says of himself 'On pouvait croire que j'aimais la nature.' (108), meaning that appearances might deceive people into that belief; of the old man and his donkey it may be truly said that they love nature.

The friend is so calm that not even the attacks of little boys armed with stones can disturb him (98-9); his philosophical reply to the policeman also contrasts strongly with the hero's encounters with the law. The friend's offer of assistance makes the hero exclaim 'Ah les gens.' (101), which is very different from the aside 'Ah les morts.' (31) in 'L'Expulsé'. The idyllic situation in which the hero lives for a while is marred only by the presence of the sea, to which he cannot reconcile himself, and by the light, presumably from a lighthouse, which enters the cave from time to time at night; as the reader learns later, the hero likes to lie in darkness with his eyes open: 'Il ne faut pas fermer les yeux, il faut les laisser ouverts dans le noir, telle est mon opinion. Je ne parle pas du sommeil, je parle de ce qu'on appelle je crois l'état de veille.' (116) It is this need for uninterrupted contemplation which prompts him to leave the cave in search of a better home.

The detailed description of the mountain hut creates

1. The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p.109

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an image of the world as it appears to man. 'C'était là l'habitation dont on m'avait la clef.' (102) The revolting effect of this passage is slightly relieved by desperate humour: 'Dans une bouse on avait tracé un coeur, percé d'une flèche. Ce n'était pourtant pas un site classé.' (102) The disappointment of the hero's quest is at the same level as the description of the friend's life; by speaking of the scene as one 'de grandeur et de désolation' (102), the hero reminds the reader of man's state as seen by Pascal, except that the possibility of a God rejected in the Nouvelles.

The farcical scene with the cow has the effect of returning the nouvelle to a lower level of significance. There is here too, however, a thematic link with the central part of 'La Fin', since the hero's attempts to exploit the cow contrast with the friend's cooperation with his donkey: the hero is here closer to Pozzo than to the old man. Judged by the criterion of adjustment to his environment, or skill in handling practical matters, the hero is a lamentable failure; like Murphy, however, he rejects 'contact with outer reality [as] the index of mental well-being'.¹ The area of his concerns is the inner world.

¹ Murphy, p.177
attend exclusively to the inner voice. The cultivation of the mental life is a topic dear to certain post-Cartesian philosophers, and is implied by the reference to Geulincz and the dark glasses (105-6), as Hugh Kenner has explained. The life of contemplation is the ideal at the end of this story, and begging is practised only as a means to this end.

The long discussion of the techniques of begging is another instance of the trait, already noted, which consists in prizing expertise. Whereas the art of doffing a hat without revealing the skull was the subject of a humorous passage, the consideration of charity here becomes a subtle analysis of human psychology: 'Il y en a évidemment qui se pènchent, mais en général les gens qui font l'aumône n'aiment pas beaucoup que cela les oblige à se pencher.' (108) As in 'L'Expulsé', the hero demonstrates a considerable insight into the motives which prompt behaviour, and has a shrewd ability to profit from them. If there seems to be a culpable laziness in this practice of begging, then the cruelty of people in general, and the thieving urchins in particular, perhaps tends to excuse the hero somewhat.

In 'L'Expulsé' there is, as already indicated, a very careful control of sympathy, which is more freely handled in 'La Fin'. The long, distasteful, passage on the hero's bodily ailments (109-10) has a certain hideous fascination. The hero values calm very highly, and so details the known facts of his physical condition, since, to quote from Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare, 'the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.' Beckett shows great daring in his willingness, for the sake of

character-study, to risk alienating the reader; still more remarkable is his ability, having handicapped himself in this way, to compensate for the disadvantage and to restore sympathy between reader and hero, as in the scene with the orator.

The orator expresses a point of view which may well have occurred to the reader, and which runs counter to the drift of the nouvelle as a whole; this view insists on seeing the hero as a fact in the social situation rather than as an example of the human condition. Beckett defines his frame of reference by invalidating the orator's point of view through comic deflation. The two principal techniques used here are ridicule and inversion. The orator is shown as ridiculous by the summarising of his speech in the form 'Union ... frères ... Marx ... capital ... bifteck ... amour.' (111), and by the heckler's undermining of his rhetorical tricks. The orator's crude characterisation of the hero, whom he claims to pity, is then tellingly inverted by the hero, whose point of view triumphs when he gently regrets the orator's outburst: 'Cela devait être un fanatique religieux, je ne trouvais pas d'autre explication. Il s'était peut-être échappé du cabanon. Il avait une bonne tête, un peu rougeaude.' (113)

This control of tone, and so of the nouvelle's direction and impact, is masterly.

Associated with the hero's preference for the inner over the outer world is his drastic reduction of expenses: 'Je n'avais presque pas de frais.' (113) The hero frees himself not only from conventional behaviour but also from ordinary desires: 'Quant à mes besoins, ils s'étaient en quelque sorte réduits à mes dimensions et, sous l'angle de la qualité, tellement raffinées que tout secours était exclu, à ce point de vue-là.' (118) The essay on Proust
refers to this attitude as 'the wisdom that consists not in the satisfaction but in the ablation of desire'. ¹

In spite of his need to beg occasionally, the hero feels free: 'Il me semblait que j'avais acquis de l'indépendance dans les dernières années.' (118) The processes of getting and spending, which were satirised earlier in the Nouvelles, are now largely disregarded, because irrelevant to this way of life.

The life of the hero is now so far from the normal pattern of life that it may appear to be a living death; the hero himself is perhaps aware of this, as he lies in his coffin-like box and longs for the ideal suicide. The notion of suicide tempted the hero earlier, when he was returning from the mountain hut (105), but did not then, and does not now, take his life. Another quotation from the essay on Proust may help to explain the hero's reason for not killing himself: '... he [Swann] feels that ... his life is ... so utterly bereft of any individual or permanent necessity, that his death, now or tomorrow or in a year or in ten, would be a termination but not a conclusion.' ² The hero shares Beckett's summary of Swann's outlook, and, while consciously waiting for the termination of his life, imagines another case in which death might be valued as a conclusion to life.

The last paragraph has two basic tones: the simple matter-of-fact tone used in description modulates into an evocative lyricism towards the end. The transition between the tones is made via self-deprecating humour, which contrasts the real world of 'la merde' with the ideal world of 'les images': 'Se tailler un royaume, au milieu de la merde universelle, puis chier dessus, ça

1. Proust, p.18
2. Proust, pp.67-8
c'était bien de moi. Elles étaient moi, mes ordures, c'est une affaire entendue, mais tout de même. Assez, assez, les images, me voila entraîné de voir des images, moi qui n'en voyais jamais, sauf quelquefois, quand je dormais.' (119-20) Memories of childhood establish the wistful tone of the concluding pages, which are kept from sentimentality by the careful outlining of the method by which his imagined death is being contrived.

The longing for death is a longing for pattern and shape, as is suggested by the hero's responses to the sounds of sea and wind: 'Je supportais mal la mer, ses clapotements, secousses, marées et convulsivité générale. Le vent lui s'arrête quelquefois.' (100-1) The completely free flux of the sea is unending and so is unbearable for the hero, who can scarcely tolerate his own continuing existence. Shortly before imagining the suicide, the hero wishes that he might hear distinct rather than confused noises: 'Ce que j'aurais voulu, c'étaient des coups de marteau, pan, pan, pan, frappés dans le désert.' (118) In a similar way, the hero of The Unnamable tries to think of time not as a flowing stream but as a series of loud bangs made by the passing seconds.¹ The notion here of a rhythmic pattern becomes the motive for the imagined suicide in 'La Fin', since this end is conceived as an immense systole (122) which will counter-balance the diastole of birth.

The noise of hammers, which is mentioned in 'La Fin', is mentioned also in Embers and Malone dies; John Fletcher, who notes this fact in Samuel Beckett's Art,² fails to note the mention of hammer-noises in How It Is and The Unnamable, and does not discuss the fact at all.

2. Samuel Beckett's Art, p.79
The ending of *Malone dies* has been misunderstood by certain critics, including Jacobsen and Mueller, who describe Lemuel and his patients as 'boarding the boat and setting out for the mainland',\(^1\) so that it is worth pointing out that the noise of hammers is peculiarly associated in Beckett's work with death by drowning. Except for the important point that 'La Fin' ends more calmly, there is a strong similarity between the voyages in the *nouvelle* and in *Malone dies*; among the shared details, in addition to the hammers, are the 'absurd lights, the stars, the beacons, the buoys, the lights of earth and in the hills the faint fires of the blazing gorse.'\(^2\) These striking resemblances, even in minutiae, support very strongly the view that Lemuel's purpose is to drown himself, as the hero imagines his own death in 'La Fin', and so to drown his patients also.

Whereas in *Malone dies*, Malone imagines the deaths of the characters in his story, and so secures his own death, after much waiting, from over-excitement, the hero of 'La Fin' dies only in imagination. The narrator-hero is alive when he tells his story, and even when he reports the final death: 'Je songeai faiblement et sans regret au récit que j'avais failli faire, récit à l'image de ma vie, je veux dire sans le courage de finir ni la force de continuer.' (122-3) These words belong only in part to the narrator-hero who uses them to end his composition; they issue from the point of view of the man imagined to be dying in the boat, and this man is, strictly speaking, an alter ego of the narrator-hero.

The term 'récit à l'image de ma vie' (123) reminds the reader that, although this account of the hero's

1. *The Testament of Samuel Beckett*, p.89
2. *Malone dies*, p.119
life is neither quite complete nor wholly true, it does have the shape which that life will ultimately take. The narrator-hero, having brought his 'récit' to the very moment at which he is telling it, finds that he is 'sans le courage de finir ni la force de continuer.' (123); because he is not strong enough to carry on the story of his life in the present tense, and is not brave enough to put an end to both story and life through actual suicide, the narrator-hero has recourse to an imaginary death. The 'récit' gives way to 'les images' (119-123), and the nouvelle ends with words from the alter ego, rather than from the narrator in propria persona, so testifying to the force of his imaginative participation in the final vision. Only through the imagination, that is, through art, can the flux of experience be given wholeness and shape during life; the longing for completeness and pattern obsesses the narrator-hero and, when given imaginative form, structures 'La Fin'. 
Chapter 5. Conclusion.

This study has tried to discuss the Nouvelles in the context of Beckett's published writing as a whole, and to show that other works are, in their turn, illuminated by an understanding of the Nouvelles. Frequent references have been made from the individual nouvelles to various other works by Beckett, both from the point of view of subject-matter and of narrative-technique. There now follows a discussion of the place which the Nouvelles occupy in the development of Beckett's art.

Several critics have, as stated earlier, viewed the Nouvelles as an introduction to the trilogy of novels, and have seen a close correspondence between the respective parts of the two works. As a consequence of their limited understanding of the second and third of the Nouvelles, John Fletcher 1 and Michael Robinson 2 both re-arrange the order of the stories as follows: 'L'Expulsé', 'La Fin', 'Le Calmant'. Although the three stories, when arranged in this order, do compare interestingly with the sequence of the three novels, Molloy, Malone dies, The Unnamable, it has been shown above that this re-arrangement of the Nouvelles is unnecessary and misleading.

In their present order, the three nouvelles have sufficient unity and diversity to form a pleasing whole. According to John Fletcher 3, Beckett himself has given support to the view that, as several internal repetitions suggest, these are three phases of one existence. The comparatively straightforward 'L'Expulsé' serves as an

2. The Long Sonata of the Dead, pp.135-8
3. The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p.102

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introduction to the group: 'Le Calmant', the most anguished as well as the most difficult of the stories, provides a contrast and is succeeded by the more relaxed and superbly accomplished 'La Fin'. The total pattern is ternary, like that of sonata-form.

Ruby Cohn¹ and Raymond Federman² both state that the Nouvelles and the trilogy of novels may be matched, part for part, in their present order. Frequent comparison was made above between 'Le Calmant' and Malone dies, so that this point seems valid in at least one place, even though Federman over-simplifies in formulating the link as 'the creation of fiction as a mental sedative'. It is hard to see how any case could be made out for more than superficial resemblance between 'La Fin' and The Unnamable, and the same is largely true of 'L'Expulsé' and Molloy.

'L'Expulsé' is, at least as regards subject-matter, comparable with Murphy, as has been shown in the second chapter of this study, rather than with Molloy. As regards style, however, this comparison, like any comparison between the Nouvelles and the fiction of Beckett's early period, reveals a complex of profound differences. The most important development in the Nouvelles is, as John Fletcher stresses in The Novels of Samuel Beckett, the adoption of the first-person point of view in the narrative; Dr. Fletcher does not, however, discuss fully this observation in the case of the Nouvelles, and seems not to appreciate its radical significance.

Belacqua Shuah, Murphy, and, to a slightly lesser extent, Watt, are all basically figures of fun, seen

1. Samuel Beckett, the comic gamut, p.114
2. Journey to Chaos, p.138, note 4
from the outside, as it were, and broadly satirised. Associated with the third-person narrative-technique there is a tone of condescension to the heroes, and a self-conscious style which often results in passages of local brilliance. In the Nouvelles it is the satire which is incidental, and the principal interest is to be found elsewhere; by identifying narrator and hero, Beckett is able to explore the main character fully, from within, as it were, and he does so with single-mindedness, rather than with the high spirits which are typical of More Pricks than Kicks and Murphy.

As implied throughout this study, the control of sympathy is the most interesting technical aspect of the Nouvelles. Having abandoned the crude narrative methods of the early fiction, Beckett here experiments with the subtle possibilities inherent in the first-person point of view. The kind and degree of sympathy between reader and narrator-hero is varied many times in the course of the Nouvelles, without ever claiming a response which would be either contemptuous or sentimental.

Clearly the Nouvelles are comparable with the trilogy of novels, although the relationship is not the simple point-for-point matter indicated by earlier critics. Without the experimentation of these stories, it is doubtful whether Beckett could, for example, have created Molloy, who is at once sympathetic and yet somehow distant, or Moran, who is at once repellent and fascinating. Although, as Michael Robinson points out, the range of the trilogy is far greater than that of the Nouvelles, the major subject of both is the activity of making, whether this be the personal making of self-

1. The Long Sonata of the Dead, p.139
hood or the literary making of fiction.

In the making of these particular works, Beckett reveals his meticulous craftsmanship. The earlier versions of 'La Fin' and 'L'Expulsé' contain much detail lacking in the revised versions, which show a marked increase in intensity. Already in the earlier version of 'L'Expulsé', Beckett tends towards longer and longer paragraphs as the story progresses; in the unpublished second part of the earlier version of 'La Fin', he may well have shown the same tendency, which reaches its extreme form in the later parts of The Unnamable. The individual nouvelles demonstrate, over their whole length, that pattern of swift rise and slow falling-away which John Fletcher has noted as a characteristic sentence-structure in Beckett's writing.¹

In their comparatively plain, simple, prose-style, the Nouvelles mark a reaction against the 'juvescent smartness', as Hugh Kenner describes it², of the early prose-style. Unfortunately, this style is inevitably modified by translation, since English is at once richer in certain associations, and yet lacking in the important double-meanings of 'le ciel', 'l'histoire', 'le sens', and 'l'assistance', for example. Even in English, however, it is clear that these stories are in a style which is sober and restrained by comparison with that of the early fiction.

In the Nouvelles there is a narrowing of focus, and concentration on an area of subject-matter which is at once restricted and yet of universal significance. Beckett here treats many of his major interests within

1. Samuel Beckett's Art, p.103

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a small compass, but avoids the dangers inherent in compression. '... Beckett's themes are so complex and so intangible that they require elaboration on a vast scale; condense them ... and the result is something like banality.' \(^1\) Richard Coe's verdict on the poem 'what would I do without this world' is inappropriate to the Nouvelles, and so helps the reader to appreciate all the more Beckett's achievement there. The Nouvelles represent an advance in Beckett's development, which has tended to reduce its scope, and to exhaust its material whenever possible; Beckett, as Jean Onimus points out \(^2\), has dared to go 'jusqu'au bout.'

These remarks on the development of Beckett's writing are particularly fitting because his career deserves to be considered as a progressing exploration. In the Nouvelles the concept of process assumes the major importance which it possesses in all of Beckett's work since 1945. Although Beckett's writing, like the title of his most recent novel, is a statement of 'how it is', this statement, as the three sections of How It Is demonstrate, is far from being a static picture. Making a search, making an inventory, and making a journey, are all typical subjects in Beckett's fiction, and all are presented as processes.

The concept of process, which is dramatised in the break between the two acts of Waiting for Godot and of Happy Days, looms large in Endgame, especially when Clov declares: 'Something is taking its course.' \(^3\) The Nouvelles, by contrast, are concerned with certain, smaller, examples of the same phenomenon, and in

2. Beckett, 1968, p.15
3. p.17
particular with the process of making a narrative, which is associated with other ways of putting things together, such as the hero's delight in doing little odd jobs of carpentry in 'La Fin' (115-6). The activity of making a narrative, as distinct from merely repeating one as, for example, Nagg does, is a practical undertaking studied not only in the Nouvelles and in the trilogy of novels, but also in Mr. Rooney's 'relation' in All that Fall, and Hamm's story or 'chronicle' in Endgame, for example. Beckett's work strives, by imitating it, to come to terms with the concept of process.

The works of Beckett's early period are, as been remarked often in this essay, clearly related to his later works. It is important, however, to recognise that the adoption of French in 1945, when the Nouvelles were conceived, marks the most significant turning-point in Beckett's career. Whereas the early works, including the short stories More Pricks than Kicks, are things made, the Nouvelles, which also belong to the class of short stories, are, though complete, things in the making.

The common view that the Nouvelles may be considered as an introduction to the novels Molloy, Malone dies, and The Unnamable, should not be taken to mean that the stories are minor, in the sense of 'inferior', works. These stories are not simply to be regarded as trial-runs for the trilogy of novels, in the way that Scenes from Clerical Life may be regarded as trial-runs for George Eliot's major works. The Nouvelles are flawless

1. Endgame, pp. 21-2.
2. pp. 32-6
3. pp. 34-40
short stories about the making of short stories, and their brevity is essential.

More Pricks than Kicks, because they have very little value as short stories, will survive only as the juvenilia of a subsequently great writer. Like More Pricks than Kicks, the Nouvelles would almost certainly be unknown today had Beckett not published the works upon which his reputation is founded: Waiting for Godot, the trilogy of novels, and Endgame. Unlike More Pricks than Kicks, however, the Nouvelles, in exploring the activity of making, reward close attention, and deserve a place beside Beckett's major creative workings with process; though not great, the Nouvelles are, like All that Fall, fascinating and perfect.
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