Chapter IV

Watt: A Game of Parody

*Parody is its own reword.*

(Internet joke)

The novels *Watt* and *Molloy* follow the pattern of repetitive and parodic transgression that characterises the fantastic mindscape of Beckett’s fictional oeuvre populated by eccentrics, bums, dregs, amorphous unnameable presences, nameless drones, catatonic dreamers, terminal couch potatoes and other scum of society. Awarding him the Nobel Prize in 1967, the Swedish Academy praised Samuel Beckett’s works for having “transmuted the destitution of modern man into his exultation”. As they limp and crawl across the pages of contemporary history those clumsy, self-conscious washouts meet the expectations of the academy by parodying human life. According to Linda Hutcheon

Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it. Parody appears, for this reason, the mode of what I have called the “ex-centric,” of those who are marginalized by a dominant ideology. (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 35)
Our concern being more epistemological in nature than ethical, a detailed study of the formal technique of parody is warranted.

Hutcheon declares in *The Politics of Postmodernism* that “Parody—often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality—is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders” (93). Margaret A. Rose discusses in detail the emergence of the postmodernist concept of parody in *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern*. The postmodern era established the parody as a concept by highlighting its ambivalent comicality and meta-fictional reflectivity. In the pre-modernist canon parody was a short (and usually versified) literary text, imitating some well known, serious and noble model, reversing its meaning and/or combining it with an inapt subject matter, to scoff at the target model. The artistic marginalization of parody due to its apparently jocular nature eased out in the early twentieth century. In the true modernist fashion, the Russian Formalists considered literary evolution as the dialectic of the centre and periphery and started treating the trivial areas of literature—which had included a large part of parodies—more positively. Parody was shifted to the center of literary processes and thus became a part of the modernist and, later and more important, the postmodernist literary canons. In postmodern literature parody came to be recognized as an aesthetically legitimate technique and it became a requisite element of meta-literary narrative. It has now become
synonymous with postmodern self-reflectivity and the playful and ambivalent intertextuality, apart from triggering a transgressive resolution of the dialectic of the peripheral and central, trivial and high, local and universal (Rose 193–273). The reification of parody in literature has been a steady and definitive process. The term parody was often disguised under other expressions like carnivalization and hybridisation, the result of a prejudice towards its triviality, until the ideas of Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida and gave it legitimacy. The formal and semantic dimensions of parody have now become an implicit explanatory model for the theoreticians of postmodernism. According to Linda Hutcheon, parody has become "a constructive principle in literary history" (A Theory of Parody 36).

A very important figure in literary criticism that actualized the concept of parody and amplified its illustrative power is Mikhail Bakhtin. He is one of the great literary theoreticians of the twentieth century and is a predecessor to the postmodernist trend. Joseph A. Dane calls him “the most influential theoretician of parody” (8). Bakhtin borrowed the idea of the masterful role of the parody in the evolution of the novel from the formalists. He also got impetus from the anti-realist tradition of the parodic novels of Miguel Cervantes and Lawrence Sterne, which he augmented with the ancient and medieval repertoire of comic genres, and most importantly the popular carnival culture of the Middle Ages (Rose 125–127). He connected his
discussions of literary development and the socio-historical roles of parody to the novel. Parody, for Bakhtin, played a double role. Parody was instrumental in relativizing and outstripping the metaphysical image of the world in general and language in particular. At the same time, it stimulates a process of democratization and pluralization of linguistic activity. John Docker, writing on the carnivalesque in the novel, suggests, “Bakhtin clearly relishes difference, variety, alterity, plurality, otherness, randomness” (171). As a literary and cultural historian Bakhtin treated as parodic those literary genres and forms that belonged to the tradition of the carnivalesque literature. Bakhtin's theory of dialogism was a call for an extensive spread of his conceptions. Dialogism—a fundamentally open, transgressive model of theoretical writing—was the sum total of his concepts of carnivalization, satire, and parodic play. In the late 1960's Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes integrated the concepts of parody and carnival to a new, anti-traditional and anti-bourgeois notion of the literary discourse. This postmodernist transgressional discourse repudiates the rules of mimetic representation, undermines metaphysical codes and hierarchies, and promotes free, Dionysian play and imagination. In practice, it is apparent as an intertextual, open ended, dynamic game of signifiers without fixed meaning, as a play of genus patterns, rhetorical forms, quotations or clichés. The idea of the subject's intertextual organization sidesteps all kinds of authoritarian
focal points hiding under the guise of author, intention, tradition, history, reality, metaphysics, morality, other meta-discourses and extra-textual references and transgresses the border between the I and the Other. It had a great impact on postmodernist theory and art.

Bakhtin treated parody and stylization in tandem. In the parody the author's voice infiltrates into someone else's discourse, although, unlike in stylization, it clashes harshly with its host, so that it becomes a tug between two opposing semantic intentions. In Bakhtin's words, "discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 193–194). Bakhtin points out the subject's distancing from the existing forms of representation and the self-reflective recognition of their merely relative, conditional validity.

The most extensive and most thorough of Bakhtin's definitions of parody is in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. He suggests:

Every type of parody or travesty, every word "with conditions attached," with irony, enclosed in intonational quotation marks, every type of indirect word is in a broad sense an intentional hybrid — but a hybrid compounded of two orders: one linguistic (a single language) and one stylistic. In actual fact, in parodic discourse two styles, two "languages" (both intra-lingual) come together and to certain extent are crossed with each other: the language
being parodied (for example, the language of the heroic
teach poem) and the language that parodies (low prosaic
language, familiar conversational language, the language
of the realistic genres, "normal" language, "healthy"
literary language as the author of the parody conceived it).
[. . .] It is the nature of every parody to transpose the
values of the parodied style, to highlight certain elements
while leaving others in the shade: parody is always biased
in some direction, and this bias is dictated by the
distinctive features of the parodying language, its
accentual system, its structure [. . .]. Thus it is that in
parody two languages are crossed with each other, as well
as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final
analysis two speaking subjects. (75–76)

Linda Hutcheon links the double-coding characteristic of post-
modernism to the double coding inherent in parody. She challenges the
assumption that parody’s double coding always results in comic form,
preferring, rather, to characterize parody as “repetition with critical
difference” (A Theory of Parody 6) Margaret Rose suggests that
Hutcheon’s “virtual elimination of the comic from parody [. . .] may be
described [. . .] as a ‘late-modern’ reaction to the modern description
of parody as burlesque comedy which has divided parody from the
comic rather than reunited the latter with the parody’s more intertextual aspects" (239).

The act of parodic repetition turns the mode of the novel from the one engaged in the service, retrieval and advancement of knowledge to one inexorably propelled into the unpredictable abyss of ignorance. As seen earlier, the breakdown of representation is felt immediately as an internal event that happens to the novel. It affects the way the novel operates as a signifier. Glen Cavaliero in *The Alchemy of Laughter: Comedy in English Fiction* has suggested that:

> Even when the parody is largely celebratory [...] it is also purposeful, its target the tyranny of the monolith, its aim to be liberating and remedial. Both the strength and the weakness of any literary artifact can be illuminated by a parody. (60)

The attempt of postmodern literature as it is played out in a novel like *Watt*, amounts to an exploration of what happens to sense once it is released from the grip of representation. Anthony Cronin gives *Watt* a unique position in Beckett’s oeuvre. He suggests that *Watt* was a book about something which was central to Beckett and it could not have been written by anybody else. It not only signalled its author’s break with the traditional novel,
but it marked also his rejection of all assumed modes and accepted subjects. (336)

Watt’s repetitive representation topples organic representation. It alters through parody and traverses by way of transgression the limits set to representation. Watt performs a thorough recasting of the traditional form of representation of reality, which registers as a transgressive act. The initial movement of the narrative is reflexive. The novel interrogates its own language to observe how meaning is transformed through incursive acts of transgression. Watt starts uncovering a whole gamut of meaning, irreducible to common sense and good sense, belonging to the domain of non-sense. Between the signifier and the signified of the organized difference of representation is introduced an infringement that persistently ruptures the language of representation. Beckett’s attempt is to inscribe this gap in the narrative against the tide of organic representation. This signifies the transgression of the text that has traditionally imprisoned meaning within signification (conceptual difference). A paradoxical logic of meaning is epitomized in the novel by the appearance-disappearance of Watt the character. Watt’s arrival is described thus:

Then it moved on, disclosing, on the pavement, motionless, a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind it. (16)
Watt is forever fixed in a double-dimension through the intended parody on the interrogative ‘what.’ The interrogative is a response and a question, a word that places the language of representation outside of itself and transforms it into a transgressive narrative. Watt the character and Watt the novel both are bereft of any singular and closed identity, which can vouch for their unimpeded representation. Thomas Docherty in “The Ethics of Alterity” points out:

Postmodern narrative disturbs the neat equations of the economy of identity, reversing the trajectory described by earlier narratives. In postmodern characterisation, the narrative trajectory is from the assumed homogeneity of identity [. . .] towards an endlessly proliferating heterogeneity, whereby identity is endlessly deferred and replaced by a scenario in which the ‘character’ or figure constantly differs from itself, denying the possession of and by a self and preferring an engagement with the Otherness. Every mention of the proper name, for instance, operates to release a new narrative, one which is typically at odds with the narratives previously ascribed to that proper name in the fiction. Rather than the self being identified with one narrative (biography), in this postmodern model the self disappears under a welter of proliferating narratives, ‘forking paths’, which never
cohere or become exactly commensurable with one another. (143)

Transgression, in Watt takes the form of a self-parodic mode that interrupts and neutralises the discursive mediation of reality normally performed by representation. Instead of actualising the reality situated outside of it, the language of representation in Watt disturbs the possibility of such a union by reflecting on itself. By parodying its own process of representation, the text achieves a kind of suspended virtuality. Instead of reproducing reality, the text is embroiled in an incomprehensible reality that, paradoxically, arises within itself without exactly corresponding to itself. Redoublement, key to parody, does not involve the mechanical repetition of the discourse of representation. A composite epistemological activity within the text triggers a de-doubling which, instead of assisting the course of representation and fixing self-identity, self-knowledge or any absolute knowledge about reality, serves to neutralize this process.

Repetition through parody is transgressive because its ultimate consequence is the redeployment of orgic difference in the organic representation of difference. Here repetition is not the identical reproduction of a previously given identity, but is a complex transgressive act that interrogates identity. In Watt, parody triggers a textuality whose surreptitious displacement of an unrepresentable reality strongly echoes Deleuze’s concept of a deeper repetition
triggered by an economy of difference that survives through the disintegration of representation.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze introduces the radically transgressive concepts of difference and repetition that resist the hold of anthropomorphic and phenomenological thinking. He says:

The signs may be noted [...]; the contemporary novelist's art which revolves around difference and repetition, not only in its most abstract reflections but also on its effective techniques; the discovery in a variety of fields of a power peculiar to repetition, a power which also inhabits the unconscious, language and art. All these signs may be attributed to a generalised anti-Hegelianism: difference and repetition have taken the place of the identical and the negative, of identity and contradiction. (xix)

He goes on to suggest that

The primacy of identity, however conceived, defines the world of representation. But modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical. The modern world is one of simulacra. Man did not survive God, nor did the identity of the subject survive that of substance. All identities are
only simulated, produced as an optical ‘effect’ by the more profound game of difference and repetition. (xix)

Watt can be said to be an optical illusion as he resides in a non-place. The location of the parodic repetition, key to the process of the transgressive resistance engineered by the text, is not fixed outside the space of representation. It is necessarily embedded within the narrative as an integral part of its very logic. In Beckett, parody is a way of registering substrata levels of thought and is embodied as a plane of repetition inscribed at the very origin of representation as a built-in apparatus. Parody is not regarded as a means towards an end, which purposely mocks and deprecates the process of representation as false. Such an attempt at denunciation would have demanded a project of resistance designed from the outside, even preceding the inception of the text. On the contrary, parody is a textual practice of transgression consequent to the emergence of the text itself and responds to a process of resistance activated by its differential nature. It challenges the traditional textual practice where difference is repeated organically and is made to function according to a model of identity that remains unchallenged throughout the process of representation.

Thus parody comprises of repetition that reintroduces orgic difference within the same. The objective of parody in Watt and to an extent in Molloy is to de-familiarize the reader with the meanings that render themselves naturally to her/him, and to problematize the very
scene of representation itself through a deconstruction of the
discourses that dictate representation. Parody causes both the
foregrounding and the concomitant neutralizing of a discourse that
purports to mirror, transparently, the essence of an unproblematic
reality. Parody, as a textual practice, constitutes a passage where, in
the words of Foucault,

> The threshold between Classicism and modernity

(though the terms themselves have no importance—let us
say between our prehistory and what is still contemporary)
had been definitively crossed when words ceased to
intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous
grid for knowledge of things. (The Order of Things 304)

*Watt* triggers a suspension of belief in the ability of the writer to
re-present reality faithfully. The protagonist Watt experiences language
as a site of singularity and dispersion making the text trapped forever
in a state of ignorance. Its parodic mode, its relentless repetition of the
process of representation to which it cannot stick on anymore,
ultimately leads to the production of transgressive forms of realities
that activate the internal displacement of the scene of representation.

As we have already mentioned, *Watt* is a fiction that, as it writes
itself, questions the model of reality that had defined and identified it
in advance. *Watt*, like the character Watt, is in fact a misfit. The
novel's attempt to repeat (represent) reality quickly turns into parody
as it comes up against a resistance and an otherness coinciding with its own appearance as text. It is saddled with a language in which meaning is constantly problematized and which persistently transgresses the bounds defined by the discourse of representation.

In its parodic mode Watt becomes a repetition of representation, neither a simple enactment nor a reproduction because Watt does not correspond exactly with representation. Watt inhabits the dusk lands of representation being located in the mediation between reality and representation, but does not simply mediate their transaction. Watt is a text that experiences reality as immediately a representation and representation as a problematic reality. Watt’s self-consciousness about this condition causes the interruption of the smooth passage of reality into representation and the apprehension of the latter as a spread out structure. Here parody becomes a practice that increases the self-consciousness of the representation. Instead of being organically articulated into a coherent totality, the text delays and blocks this process of articulation and produces multiple and conflicting possibilities that disrupt the normal process of representation.

This representation of the impossibility of representation elicits a withdrawal and a retracing within the text. Parody becomes a textual gesture of retreat—a neutralization of language occurring within language. As language disengages from this discourse, it connects with a larger economy of difference located within representation. Parody
remains involved in the form of repetition or retracing with representation without completely submitting to it or opposing it. Parody makes representation diffident, thereby putting it in a quandary.

The double nature of parodic gesture is, for example, illustrated in Molloy through Molloy’s strange behaviour when he wakes up in his house. One of his actions is to knock down the furniture placed around the room (45). He is thus immediately engaged in the disordering of the order that surrounds him. His surroundings present themselves as a reality that has already been represented, that is to say, organized and shaped. Molloy concedes:

But that there were natural causes to all these things I am willing to concede, for the resources of nature are infinite apparently. It was I who was not natural enough to enter into that order of things, and appreciate its niceties. (46)

This kind of organisation corresponds to organic representation. Molloy’s first instinct is to restore this order to the power of orgic distribution that already passes through his very own being. His action does not amount to a simple act of destruction, but involves a kind of systematic deconstruction that puts representation momentarily out of itself.

This movement is related to the neutralizations, the hesitations and the indeterminacies that dominate the beginning of Watt. Neutralization implies a kind of silencing of language within the text
itself, in which the first phrase is echoed several lines later by the second. “A silence followed these words. [. . . ] A silence followed these angry words” (21). Contemplative moments like this are found in Molloy as well. Molloy reflecting at length on the furniture lying on the floor in disarray after his disordering attempts is a good example. This moment of deliberation, however, does not signify a complete retreat from the scene of representation and the securing of an alternate space that could be divorced from representation. If that were so, Molloy, the subject of transgression, will come to inhabit a putative space sheltered by his own act of transgression, which would offer him the possibility of retreat. On the contrary, he is forced again to directly engage the objective order that continues to face him. “But of this little game too I soon wearied and suddenly stood stock still in the middle of the room” (Molloy 45).

Here, transgression necessarily involves a repetition performed by a subject who is repeated differentially by this transgression. Since Molloy is now engaged in repetition (re-placing the furniture, re-storing the order) the act of representation itself is submitted to a slight internal difference. Every act of Molloy, as he goes round the room, becomes a parody of itself. The subject remains implicated in the very process of representation as a force of repetition that secretly continues to disturb the universal domain of representation from within.
This shows how, on a formal level, the text continues to engage the process of representation. The text retraces this process becoming its own double and rapidly re-inscribing representation within a deeper production of difference. Representation is forced to reconstruct itself—Molloy helps replace the furniture in its place—in a self-conscious and de-doubling fashion. The process of deconstruction becomes part of the very act of construction and is executed with a kind of obsessive fervour to repeat. It ends up transgressing the site representing the continuation of parody. Parody is thus a strategy that guarantees that the continuance of transgression will take place within representation.

The fact that Molloy helps the servant put the furniture back in its place is only an apparent concession which does not signify complete submission, for, while recreating the scene Molloy continues to refuse to retract into its order. He creates a disturbance that delays the process of representation. Here, retracing does not result in reproduction, but a series of repetitions through which an internal difference is created. Molloy replaces the furniture in an exaggerated fashion, thus parodying the process of representation as it occurs.

Watt embarks on a similar kind of transgressive act in Knott’s house when he decides not to attend to the eating of the food by the dog. His action was not the result of any intended rebellion against Knott’s orders. It simply occurred as a result of an internal shift that
forced Watt—he was forced to transgress—to slightly modify his behaviour and thus introduce a difference into the overall organization at Knott’s house.

Molloy’s double parodic transgression similarly subverts the order of representation without simply submitting it to chaos. This parodic transgression causes order and disorder—as well as the subject and the object—to be thought jointly rather than separately within the interiority of representation as two economies, which do not necessarily converge but problematize and question each other. Molloy’s and Watt’s secret repetition merely expresses the power of this transgression without being deliberately subversive. Through this transgression disorder and order are brought together as the product of a force that resides within representation, which makes order and disorder possible while overriding them.

The same kind of technique accounts for all the parodic-transgressive echoes and repetitions that occur in the beginning of Watt. The same words in the short lifeless dialogues are repeated several times in quick succession. “My dear fellow, my dear fellow, how are you? [. . .]My wife, cried the gentleman. Meet my wife. My wife” (10). This seemingly innocuous sequence of repetition hides a cunning act of verbal gaming. The repetition disrupts the usually smooth articulation of words in the representative discourse by exposing them to the strangeness of their own material resonance. This
resonance then generates an internal dissociation or difference of language.

Similarly, the poem to Nelly is presented twice and Arsene appears twice before addressing Watt and reappears again after he leaves. “But he had not been long gone when he appeared again, to Watt” (63). Reality is experienced as a dimension that is trapped in repetition or as fashioned through repetition. The internality that protects the space of identity is immediately redoubled upon itself. This repetition is what makes the same different from itself in the very instance of its actualisation.

And as Watt fixed his eyes on what he thought was perhaps the day again already, the man standing sideways in the kitchen doorway looking at him became two men standing sideways in two kitchen doorways looking at him. (Watt 63)

The replication of reality into two separate yet concomitant linguistic degrees invalidates the possibility that any singular reality could be fully and meaningfully embodied through the act of representation. Reality is a representation split right from the point of its inception. It is inundated immediately by the elusiveness of language that complicates, even as it assists, the possibility of the presenting of reality. Reality is both overloaded—too much reality so that it has to be presented as its own simulacra—and invalidated
because it is a rhetorical construct. Reality resists simple organic representation because it is itself already a repetition of pure difference, a dimension that cannot be conceptually represented.

In this sense, *Watt* constitutes a kind of apprehensive repetition that transforms reality right from the start because it cannot capture it properly or else grasps it as a complication, a proliferation of simulacra leading to the dissolution of the original. This parodic mode demolishes the edifice of mimesis and along with it the linguistic possibility of reaching directly and translating the essence of a pre-existent reality. As a novelist Beckett was aware that the material level of reality is shaped, somehow, in advance by the inscrutable words that give it form and substance. Language repeats reality in such a way that the latter becomes virtually indistinguishable from the former. But they do not achieve perfect concurrence, as in mimetic representation, but achieves a kind of co-existence that ruptures the very process of representation. In *Watt*, this rupture causes Hackett to experience an internal sense of dispossession at the very moment in which he happens to come into the possession of reality:

> This seat, the property very likely of the municipality, or of the public was of course not his, but he thought of it as his. This was Mr Hackett’s attitude towards things that pleased him. He knew they were not his, but he thought of them as his. (7)
The concept of property, for example, is defined not as a territory that has been ordered in advance to be possessed by a symbolic subject that simply takes it over or claims it as its own, but as an unsettled space that is problematized further by the way it is apprehended by a desiring subject. Deleuze points out in *Difference and Repetition*:

In all his novels, Samuel Beckett has traced the inventory of peculiarities pursued with fatigue and passion by larval subjects: Molloy’s series of stones, Murphy’s biscuits, Malone’s possessions—it is always a question of drawing a small difference, a weak generality, from the repetition of elements or the organisation of cases. It is one of the more profound intentions of the ‘new novel’ to rediscover, below the level of active syntheses, the domain of passive syntheses which constitute us, the domain of modifications, tropisms and little peculiarities. (79)

A sense of self-alienation is expressed in Hackett’s initial vacillation as he embarks on his perilous course through the enigmatic world. Hackett’s indecision is not caused entirely by the indeterminacy of reality itself (Is the bench a public space or a private space? Are the buses stopped from the inside or the outside?). It is the result of an awareness that the reality itself depends on his ability to make a personal choice. (Should I go on or go back home, Even though the bench is not mine, I can think of it as mine.) However he appears to
have only a partial stake in his own choice. It is subject to the quirks of a very private space that resides within him over which he has no conscious control. It eludes him just as the world of public representation does.

This uncertainty between private and public results in the problematization of the general relationship between the inside and the outside. In most cases the Beckettian subjects will become actively engaged in privately repeating or parodying, and thus transgressing, the public world of representation. This private space is a nodal multiplicity, a vigorous diffusion that continues to repeat the subject differentially. This problematization of the public and the private or the inside and the outside results in a subversion of representation and its dependence on a comprehensible process of articulation between previously identified realms of externality and internality. In *Watt*, reality is always regarded as a representation posited in the guise of a public space and the onus of internalising and iterating (parodying) this external construct falls on a text that cannot, unfortunately, reproduce nor properly domesticate this structure as it is unable to distinguish completely between itself and this reality. Thus, the text is enmeshed in self-alienation and dispossession: its internality is invaded by an externality that, paradoxically, is instrumental in the material emergence of the text itself.
The mimetic representation of the reality in fiction depends, to a large degree, on how the text engages the question of representation. In *Watt*, the parodic nature of this engagement makes it impossible to represent reality ‘correctly’. A predilection, inherent in the text, to contest the veracity of representation turns the text transgressive. Beckett’s fiction is unable to appropriate reality by way of internalising or completely objectify the real world through externalising. Hackett’s bench is not his yet but it is not ‘not his’ either, and Malone’s possessions are not recovered wholly but they are not missing totally. Like Hackett, the text is located at the focal point of a tension that negates the possibility of simple representation based on the subject-object duality and the separation between inside and outside. The text points towards a non-hegemonic relationship between the subject and object which cannot be defined in terms of ownership in which there is a convenient separation of activity and passivity, possessor and possessed, the internal and the external. *Watt* experiences dispossession both externally and internally. Externally the text is dispossessed by reality that has been forsaken by representation. The text’s own parodic representation of reality engenders the internal dispossession. This internal dispossession, in turn, forms the locus of a transgression facilitated by the text. The text acts as channel for a process of orgic repetition that, unlike organic representation, does not permit the text to absent itself from the
process of representation. It forces the text to become implicated in the way in which this repetition transgresses the world of representation.

Watt’s parodic repetition of representation shows that the text cannot match the discourse of representation because it experiences representation as a differential element of its own language. Within the internal space of the text the force of repetition causes the fragmentation and dispersion of the language of representation. Parody becomes a transgressive force that opens an internal breach, leaving the text without ground or support other than the dynamics of repetition.

Parody causes both the break up and the dissemination of language and a proliferation of singular discourse that co-exist, without any possibility of reunification. This explains the disjointed nature of the first part of Watt, which is made up of several fragments that seem to both embody and mock several literary traditions, such as the epic, the poetic and the realistic discourses. The function of parody is to present the arbitrariness of these linguistic traditions and literary genres and to demolish their pretensions of metaphysical absoluteness and universality by stating them side by side in such a way that they end up cancelling each other. Stating as opposed to the general process of elicitation generates a kind of internal repetition that also results in the neutralization of these discourses. They appear as arbitrarily constructed units threatened to be swallowed up by an internal silence.
The idea of the text as a unified discourse is at stake here because these singular discourses refuse to correspond with it. Neither does it represent the sum total of these singularities. Rather than being identified with any of them the text traverses all of them by conjuring them up and then invalidating them. It is the very concept of discursive self-identity that is being shattered here. The text constitutes a passage, a narrative site of several discourses that it merely parodies without ever coinciding with any of them. It becomes a force of dispersion and repetition that lets loose orgic difference across the space of organic representation and is triggered by the logic of non-sense that challenges good sense and common sense. Watt’s transgressive repetition of representation surpasses any notion of resemblance or equivalence. These two main orders are both parodied and questioned in Watt as embodying a kind of false economy based on the eternal return of the same:

But another evening shall come [. . .] and the door open to the wind or the rain or the sleet or the hail or the snow or the slush or the storm or the warm still scents of summer or the still of the ice or the earth awakening or the hush of harvest or the leaves falling through the dark [. . .] then running together in heaps, here a heap, and there a heap, to be paddled in by happy boys and girls on their way home from school looking forward to Hallow’s E’en and Guy
Fawkes and Christmas and the New Year, haw! Yes, happy girls and boys looking forward to happy New Year, and then carted off in old barrows and used as dung the following spring by the poor, and a man come, shutting the door behind him, and Erskine go. And then another night fall and another man come and Watt go, Watt who is now come, for the coming is in the shadow of the going and the going is in the shadow of the coming, that is the annoying part about it. (57)

The repetition parodied in this passage is based on the organic taming of difference through the quantitative order of equivalences such as the return of seasons or holidays and evenings. This system makes possible the universal model of representation. It allows for specific universal identifications that repress orgic difference. The parodic repetition of this process of organic identification, which constitutes the core of Watt’s fictional mechanism, contests the possibility of classifying reality by separating it into quantifiable parts that can then be evaluated, exchanged and thus infinitely retrieved.

Watt transgresses this process by redoing it as parody. In order to make Knott’s soup, Watt must mix together a seemingly endless variety of ingredients that have been previously carefully identified and separated:
All these things, and many others too numerous to mention, were well mixed together in the famous pot and boiled for four hours, until the consistence of a mess, or poss, was obtained, and all the good things to take for the good of the health were inextricably mingled and transformed into a single good thing that was neither food, drink, nor physic, but quite a new good thing. (87)

First, Watt must repeat the organic task of having to properly measure and count the ingredients before mixing them together (parodic level):

It fell to Watt to weigh, to measure and to count, with the utmost exactness, the ingredients that composed this dish [. . .], and to mix them thoroughly together without loss, so that not one could be distinguished form another. (87)

However, Watt’s careful hierarchical distribution of elements is redoubled internally by a larger differential economy of orgic distribution that erases specifically organized differences. The entirely “new good thing,” that results from Watt’s careful operation of identification is a “mess” that “was neither food, nor drink, nor physic.” Organic representation is overridden by an innate tendency at work that returns all things to the original chaos of orgic difference. Beckett’s attempt is not to represent a chaotic world made up of confused shapes that threaten the world of identities from the outside. His intent is to show how the process of identification is itself part of
a larger economy that always returns all identities to chaos and to
carelessness. The world of representation attempts to escape such orgic
redistribution through a process of repetition through resemblances and
equivalences that ensures the mechanical return of specific differences.

Parody transgresses the space of identity by constituting a kind
of repetition that leads to the disconcerting experience, for example, of
Mr. Nixon confusing Hatchett and Watt: “The curious thing is, my dear
fellow, I tell you frankly, that when I see him, or think of him, I think
of you, and that when I see you, or think of you, I think of him” (19).
The result of this process of mutual resemblance, indicative of an
inability to measure and exchange difference organically, is that
neither the identity of Hatchett nor that of Watt can be firmly
established. The constitution of the character Watt signifies a moment
of violence done to the world of identity. It undermines the conceptual
space determined by good sense and common sense and introduces the
Beckettian text to the world of nonsense. The character Watt is not a
pre-determined entity or quality that can be quantified, measured and
directly referred to or accounted for through the usual elements at
work in organic representation: his name can only be accessed through
the question ‘what’. Watt does not have any fixed, identifiable feature
that observers can judge and agree on. He presents himself as a
nameless mass—“mess”—or a kind of indeterminate substance that
resists organization.
Watt introduces a sense of discord among those who attempt to identify him. He puts to test their capacity for comprehension by trying to wriggle out of all attempts at labelling him. Watt is a nomadic figure who at first glance seems to have little that is human about him:

Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman. Mr Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord. (16)

In their unsuccessful attempt to represent this unidentifiable creature Hackett, Nixon and Nelly echo the difficulty experienced by the text itself. Watt is a sign that cannot be translated into a signified. Any attempt to represent him will result in a process of repetition that will further diffuse the character. Simultaneously, the text finds itself unable to articulate any absolute kind of meaning. Watt, for example, is unable to positively identify a pot. In fact, he learns to his dismay that all the objects in Mr. Knott’s house defy verbalisation including the Master himself. Lawrence Harvey says:

Watt learns nothing. He experiences uncertainty, unfulfillment, solitude, deprivation, and emptiness. He lives out a fruitless quest. As a maker he must discover or invent verbal forms to express his experience [. . .]. He is the artist in search of the form of meaninglessness, which is also paradoxically, a kind of meaning. (380)
Words fail to match the objects they are supposed to represent. Objects are not fixed entities to be represented by a word-sign. They are themselves ambiguous signs that appear in the form of alienated words unable to identify them properly or as imprecise things that shift with the subject itself. A double-disjunction is generated with a fugitive object and a subject deprived of anchors or reference points.

The eruption of non-sense as a prevailing economy within language and within difference in general forces Nelly or Nixon to try to solve the enigma that is Watt’s by engaging in a process of questions and answers (17-19). This repetitive interrogation fails to provide a conclusive representation of Watt and ends up an infinite hypothetical operation that cannot reach any absolute truth about Watt. Watt is an odd being that cannot be measured by the usual standards of organic representation. He lacks nationality, family, place of birth, occupation, and distinctive signs and thus resists the traditional process of identification carried out by representation.

In Beckett’s fiction, reality constitutes a dimension whose objective representation is immediately parodied. As if in a literary game reality is repeated differentially through the workings of a destabilized and unpredictable subjectivity that is itself repeated within the orgic displacement of language. This transgressive repetition is located in a passage that is generated through a parodic disruption of language.