Chapter I

Transgressing Hegel

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

William Blake

The incursion into the universal and the necessary by the individual and the contingent is a major aspect of the postmodern ethos. Meta-narratives are viewed with suspicion for their predilection for totalising discourse and for their propensity to legitimise the authoritarian and the autocratic. It is an interrogation, which began with the Sophists as they challenged Plato’s rational discourses. Nietzsche’s repudiation of the Western canons of Apollonian authority and Enlightenment rationality in the nineteenth century was an important stage in its genealogy. The postmodernists finished the task with aplomb in Lyotard’s repudiation of universal narratives for the sake of ‘petite narratives,’ Foucault’s constructs of transgression and genealogy, Derrida’s concepts of différance, Baudrillard’s elaboration of simulacrum and Deleuze’s theories of difference and repetition.
The Cartesian systematisation of the Platonic dialectic established a transcendental, disinterested, and central authority that presided over the rational world. Hegel elaborated the Cartesian binaries into a dialectical methodology in which all differences, except the overriding one of conceptual difference, were obliterated for the sake of a logical system. Modernity hides in its core the vestiges of Hegelian legacy even as it tries to revolt against the established strictures and structures. The dialectical epistemology employed by the structuralists and the enlightenment theses of some of the ‘progressive’ movements are examples. Jurgen Habermas, himself a self proclaimed modernist and a passionate critic of postmodernity (as his wrangle with Lyotard testifies), observes: “Hegel inaugurated the discourse of modernity. He introduced the theme—the self–critical reassurance of modernity. He established the rules within which the theme can be varied—the dialectic of enlightenment” (51). The ‘self-critical reassurance of modernity’ could be easily translated as the totalising, unproblematic and rational discourse that engages the ‘other’ in a binary to position itself as the legitimate centre. The result of this, in literature, was the emergence of artificial categories like highbrow and lowbrow (locked in a binary where the high brow held the moral high ground over the insubstantial lowbrow), the insistence that some of the modernist experimentations were the means to purify the dialect of the tribe and the premise of a unified subject position. Literature was
regarded as an enterprise reserved for the serious author who created a substantive world for a limited and discerning audience. He could be modern, avant-garde or even partisan. He was the maker and his words held sway over the cognoscenti. Anyone writing outside the edifying diktat of the highbrow culture was regarded with patronising disdain. John Docker exposes the hypocrisy of the modernist culture in Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History. He observes wryly:

A kind of puritanical rationalism does become important in modernist cultural criticism, the necessity of ‘severe thought’ about the plight of the epoch, last bulwark against the pleasures, the dissipating distractions, of the deluge of bestsellers, newspapers, film, broadcasting, advertising [. . .]. Important too would be the dislike of pluralism.

(21-22)

In fact, Habermas himself is aware of the dictatorial proclivity of modernism when he concedes that:

The parties that have contented about the correct self-understanding of modernity since the days of the Young Hegelians all agree on the point: that a far-reaching process of self-illusion was connected with the learning processes conceptualized in the eighteenth century as “enlightenment.” Agreement also exists about the fact that
the authoritarian traits of a narrow-minded enlightenment are embedded in the principle of self-consciousness or of subjectivity. That is to say, the self-relating subjectivity purchases self-consciousness only at the price of objectivating internal and external nature. Because the subject has to relate itself constantly to objects both internally and externally in its knowing and acting, it renders itself at once opaque and dependent in the very acts that are supposed to secure self-knowledge and autonomy. This limitation, built into the structure of the relation-to-self, remains unconscious in the process of becoming conscious. From this springs the tendency toward self-glorification and illusionment that is toward absolutizing a given level of reflection and emancipation.

Postmodernism rejects such ‘absolutization’ of any discourse and advocates multiplicities, differences (as substitute to binaries), self-reflexivity and polyphony. The imperious centre appearing as the unified ‘I’ who observes and records, the uncomplicated text amenable only to a designated set of readings, the language of representation capable of conveying conclusive and objective meaning, the pretentious reality authored by the narrative, the resolute intensity of the authorial gaze have all been put under intense interrogation and in
their place postmodernism posits shifting perspectives, differential readings and problematized language in search of the liminal. Lyotard declares: “Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name” (82). In this thesis, the term postmodern designates certain textual practices in the novels of Samuel Beckett that challenge the language and the laws of representation. The principal characteristic that makes Samuel Beckett a postmodern writer is the transgressive strategy he adopts to enforce a critique of modernist representation to stimulate the exploration of orgic forms of thinking. His novels instigate a transgressive interrogation of their language and textuality so as to avoid the narrative and representational closures enforced by conceptual difference.

Becket’s transgressional practices betray a certain affinity to the early twentieth century French novelist George Bataille’s theorisation of transgression. Through an active engagement with Hegelian philosophy, Bataille attempted to subvert the meta-narratives of identity and absolute knowledge. Derrida explores the transgressive laughter of Bataille directed at the negatives of the Hegelian system in “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve” (Writing and Difference 251-277). Transgression can be best understood as a going beyond, or a shattering, of moral boundaries in pursuit of a greater experience of truth, wholeness, or divinity.
Transgression is a stepping across (transgredi: trans=across, gradi=to step) of the boundaries, the behavioural and attitudinal limits, of a culture. Transgression has been defined etymologically as the process of crossing-over, of moving from an ordered and rational state to an unordered and irrational state. In the Western Judeo-Christian cultural tradition, it has also acquired moralistic tones of judgement. Adam ‘infringed’ a sacred law through his pursuit of forbidden knowledge and was punished for his transgression. The concept has become important to postmodernist thought because of the complex nature it entertains. It is at once an indistinct and variable concept that demarks and defines the boundaries it crosses. It would enunciate the parameters of the centre while resolutely occupying the margins. Most critical reviews of Bataille suggest that his entire oeuvre was concerned with articulating a theory explaining the relationship between the sacred and the profane. Suzanne Guerlac says:

Bataille elaborated a notion of transgression most explicitly in L'Erotisme (1957); an essay that reworked material from a previously unpublished piece, "L'Histoire de l'erotisme," and that harks back to a study of "erotic phenomenology" projected as early as 1939. (11)

Writing in both fictive and non-fictive genres Bataille attempted to outline how the literary text could serve as a means of expressing the boundaries of the modern subject. According to David B. Allison
individual subjectivity, in Bataille's formulation, was constituted through "the interstices of social, economic, ethical, religious, moral, sexual and linguistic encoding" (7). It was only when the self traversed any of these interstices that it became aware of not only the delineated line but also its own interior experience. For Bataille, transgression was therefore not a state of being but rather a process that occurred through the act of crossing over. Understanding of the self came from the jouissance (the joy) of passing from an ordered, logical territory to an unordered and irrational one. According to Catherine Marchak: “The joy of transgression is an elation, an exuberance that results from the letting go of all the vestiges of reason and rationality” (361). This was for Bataille as close as understanding could get to articulating the transgressive experience. As one of the original Surrealists, Bataille's project was intended to be literary rather than theoretical. It was only the use of his work by the Tel Quel group that moved it from the literary realm to the theoretical. As Suzanne Guerlac has suggested, Bataille was the only author to be important to both the pre-war and post-war French literary movements. She asserts that “He belongs both to the generation of Tel Quel, who reinvented transgression, and to the decades he shared first with Breton and then with Sartre” (5). Bataille's work on transgression was important to the theorists of Tel Quel because of its double meanings. The postmodern theorists of Tel Quel wanted to signal a radical theoretical break with previous generations
and to set a postmodern agenda for intellectual inquiry. Suzanne Guerlac calls this break a "Copernican revolution introduced by post-structuralism"(13). Bataille's notion of transgression fulfilled both of these needs. Bataille's transgression therefore became very important to all of the postmodern theorists. As Suzanne Guerlac has stated, "poststructuralist theory could not do without" Bataille's notion of transgression (11). The proof of his importance lies in the works devoted to him by the theorists of Tel Quel. Michel Foucault wrote an entire article on Bataille's notion of transgression, "Preface a la transgression," in 1963. In this article, Foucault articulated a notion of transgression, which was more extensive than Bataille's own questions about literature and individual subjectivity. Bataille saw individual subjectivity constituted as the upshot of successive acts of boundary crossing. Foucault regarded transgression as operating individually and culturally. According to Michael Richardson, the difference between Foucault and Bataille was also how and where they saw transgression as a force: "For Foucault transgression is a crucial element of contemporary society whereas Bataille believed it was being systematically excluded and that it was impossible for transgression to be anything but impotence within the society in which we live" (6). For Foucault, Bataille's concept became an articulation of social repression and limitation, concerns very near to his own work. The individual and collective selves were formulated only by the
boundaries illuminated by acts of transgression. Foucault's interpretation of Bataille's concept reflected postmodernism's own theories of how subjectivity was constituted.

For Foucault and other postmodernists the stable, Cartesian subject of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could not explain postmodern subjectivity. The postmodern destabilized subject existed on manifold levels because it was constructed from fragments. In "A Preface to Transgression," Foucault incorporated the notion of difference into his rereading of Bataille. "Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of division [...] of difference" (Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology 82). According to postmodernist theory, selfhood was constituted not only through acts of boundary transgression but also through the separation between the individual and the 'other'. Individual and collective subjectivity was conditional upon the delineation of proper values and the transference of inappropriate values to the 'other' that lived within the boundaries of the self. The 'other' in postmodernist theory defined the self through its very difference.

According to Allan Stoekl, Georges Bataille defines excess as that which challenges a closed economy (built on utility, production and rational consumption) and foregrounds the experience of the "inassimilable waste products" (xi) of the body, thought and society—
excrement, madness, poetry, the bums and the vagabonds of society. It views all unities as delusive and calls for the individual to reach lower, more essential human drives. Foucault holds that knowledge is gained only by the criticism of knowledge. Thinking, therefore, is a continual transgression of established norms of truth. It is a political act because these norms are socially constructed and maintained.

Foucault’s notion of transgression offers a valid explanation for the prevalence of extremes, of excess within contemporary fiction and other cultural practices. “A Preface to Transgression” states that sexuality is “perhaps the only source of division now possible in a world emptied of objects, beings and spaces to desecrate” (70). This world describes the postmodern condition; and here Foucault—perhaps unconsciously—helps to emphasize the need for transgression in art. Hence the proliferation of extreme, explicit, transgressive material in an era when it is apparent that many of the old battles, the conflicts of the established dialectical paradigms have been fought and won/lost, finished. Certainly, Foucault’s description of transgression as the appetite and drive for profit of the already materially satisfied (85) describes the postmodern condition of the age of excess.

Bataille and Foucault express a transgression beyond all labeling and rules. The latter argues that transgression must be detached from any association with ethics or with the scandalous. Theirs is a pure
non-dialectical conception, transgression is purely for the sake of it, and it has no purpose as such. It is against all use because if one were to exist it can no longer be truly transgressive. It becomes a critique of Hegelianism and the logic of enlightenment.

Transgression is not rebellion. It does not seek to break down boundaries or tear away limits. In fact, the limits are a necessary and reciprocal element. Transgression and limits could not exist without one another. When a limit is transgressed, there is only the uncovering of a new limit. Transgression does not want to surpass the limit, but "forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes [. . .] to experience its positive truth in its downward fall" ("A Preface to Transgression" 73). This, for Foucault is a movement of violence, not because it destroys, but because it reveals. It does not shine from the outside, but is inside. Transgression is its own limit, denies its own limit, and reveals its own limit. Before the death of God, the Limit was possible. All things rushed towards the finality, the result of their being. In the infinite space of the nothingness, there still existed the hope of a Limit, the hope that language would reach its limit, and end interpretation. However, the death of God denied self "the limit of the Limitless [. . .] in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of being, and consequently to an experience which is interior and sovereign" ("A Preface to Transgression" 71). There is no longer any external reality towards
which the text may strive. The experience with the word has to be interior—there is no exterior. This is also why transgression is an act cast upon itself. There is nothing to desecrate and nothing to oppose. However, there is another paradox. With the death of God, the infinity of interpretation, the limitlessness of body-text-self, is transfigured into absolute limit. The infinity of interpretations is its own limit. Its infinity is a limit because it is bound by the search for the absolute referent. This is why, for Foucault (and Bataille), God must stay dead. The only way to overcome the limit that the infinity of interpretations creates is

- to kill God to liberate life from this existence that limits it, but also to bring it back to those limits that are annulled by this limitless existence as a sacrifice; to kill God to return him to this nothingness he is and to manifest his existence at the center of a light that blazes like a presence for the ecstasy; to kill God in order to lose language in a deafening night.[. . .] and this is communication. (“A Preface to transgression” 72)

This interrogation of the self is an interrogation of the limit and a movement towards recapturing the self, without God. Nevertheless, this movement involves taking the self to the limit, which is where madness exists. The self becomes the schizophrenic body in which
there exists the possibility for finally liberating our language from the need to seek external definition. This is the most precarious of places to be. To try to prevent the word from seeking its reference is to risk losing self. However, as we saw, the hope of transgression is to discover the identity of the subject, which is the identification of the sacred, without God. This can only happen through taking self to the limits of the text. The word demands interpretation, for it can only reveal its identity through a hermeneutical process. The limit of this demand is what transgression seeks to surpass, and in so doing, brings the text to its own limits. According to James Miller, there lurks “madness, the dream, and erotic delirium” (143). The language of transgression is a language that seeks its own limits in a strange suicidal scurry. According to “A Preface to transgression,” there is no death, only the "place where language discovers its being at the crossing of its limits— the nondialectical form of philosophical language"(84). Beckett’s texts transgress Hegelian dialectics by altering the process through which the latter expresses alterity within a binary structure. (This shrewdness makes them belong to the Derridian concept of ‘major writing’). Nevertheless, it takes place within the conceptual metaphysical limit, which frames all the philosophic practices of the West. The linguistic activity of writing, which constitutes literature, will stretch the limits of this Hegelian space without actually eliminating it. Derrida’s comment on Bataille, in
“From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve”, could as well be applied to Beckett:

And yet, in privileged moments that are less moments than the always rapidly sketched movements of experience; rare, discreet and light movements, without triumphant stupidity, far from public view, very close to that at which laughter laughs: close to anguish, first of all, which must not even be called the negative of laughter for fear of once more being sucked in by Hegel’s discourse. And one can already foresee, in this prelude, that the impossible mediated by Bataille will always have this form: how, after having exhausted the discourse of philosophy, can one inscribe in the lexicon and syntax of a language, our language, which was also the language of philosophy, that which nevertheless exceeds the oppositions of concepts governed by this communal logic? (252-253)

The main impact of Hegelian dialectical thinking was that it established the positive integrity of absolute meaning through the confrontational dichotomy with the ‘other’. The negativity of non-sense is obliterated by the affirmative of sense (common sense, reason) as a necessary stage in the legitimisation of meaning. Non-sense has to be overridden by the master narrative and should be made to serve reason for the preservation of the all-important positivity of being.
Through a transgressive reworking of Hegelian dialectics, Beckett re-inscribes the production of meaning within the play of non-sense upsetting the unproblematic legitimating of meaning. He challenges and deranges the system of regulations, which form the basis of discursive organisations.

For Foucault, the dialectic of reason, in Hegel, amounts to the appropriation of the 'other' (non-sense) by the commanding element (reason) in the binary. Though reason is put through tests and questions in the passage through the dialectic, its ultimate trajectory is humanism and enlightenment. The dialectic is anchored in a 'progressive' and finalistic version of history and a humanistic praxis that subordinates the operation of meaning and the working of sense, in general, to anthropomorphic interests. The logic of enlightenment regulates the deployment of meaning. As a writer, engaged in capturing the interface of representation of reality and the self-representation of thought, Beckett challenges the inherent totalitarian logic of the system of representation. What he holds possible is, according to Mark C. Taylor, "profitless play," in which "the levity of comedy replaces the gravity of tragedy"(15). There is no longer surface; it has given way to a terrible and absolute depth, which can never be filled or transcended. Words never resolve themselves either to the reality of the nothingness, the finality of meaning, or to a dogma of language. However, Taylor believes that one can stay on the surface, as long as
play becomes the object of the wanderer: “In the absence of transcendence, interiority and depth give way to a labyrinthine play of surfaces. When nostalgia is gone and waiting is over, one can delight in the superficiality of appearances” (16). In this way, the text, in which the word has enmeshed itself, hiding and waiting, can renew its own surface without giving in to Foucault's warning of dogma. The surface does not have to hold the weight of anything any longer. Its depth still lurks below, but like a stone skipping over the calm skin of a lake, the words may play along the surface of the text, in a celebration of eternal wandering. In this act of transgression, language finds itself at its own limit, where the depth seeks to rip open the surface. The text no longer seeks interpretation, because there is no depth to expose; there is only surface. Therefore, the text transgresses its self, for by the very nature of it being text it attempts to dive below its surface. In “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” Foucault explains that, for Nietzsche, the interpreter must descend and be "the good excavator of the underworld" (62). Yet, for Nietzsche, the excavation reveals that there is really no depth at all. "As the world becomes more profound under our gaze, one notices that everything that exercised the profundity of man as only child's play" (“Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” 62). By staying on the surface, even though everything it is tells it to go down, it skates across the surface of the text in an act of transgression. By bringing language to the surface through the act of transgression
the writer moves language away from the dialectical prison. The paradox is that the language of the surface is actually the loss of language, insofar as language is defined by its dialectical certainty. However, the loss of language is not the destruction that the writer seeks. Rather, it is the inversion of language, a language that cannot be spoken, but experienced. Foucault points out in “A Preface to Transgression”:

Perhaps this "difficulty with words" that now hampers philosophy [...] should not be identified with the loss of language that the closure of dialectics seems to indicate. Rather, it follows from the actual penetration of philosophical experience in language and the discovery that the experience of the limit, and the manner in which philosophy must now understand it, is realized in language and in the movement where it says what cannot be said.

(86)

In The Order of things Foucault draws up the picture of the Western man’s ‘other’ as the contemporary twin man (303-340). It is a double that cannot be reduced to the ‘same’ and it consistently repulses the Hegelian reconciliation of the binary. This concept of the double brings to mind Molloy’s shadow. It is a shadow on the wall, which is neither a mirror image nor a pure reflection of the unified self but a
repetition of the self. It achieves a level of independence within the configuration of dependence the self has with its own image. Foucault considers the absent presence of this double as the basis of the singularity of modern experience (*The Order of Things* 303-340). It imposes itself transversely on the movement of the Hegelian system, defeating its conquest of the infinite by proposing an open-ended unpredictable finitude. The force of this inscription puts the production of meaning beyond the closure enforced by Hegelian thought and strips it of its ties with enlightenment hypothesis. This post-Hegelianism proposes the presence of the other within the self itself, negating the possibility of dialectical alterity. A good example of the application of this idea in fiction can be found in Jorge Luis Borges’ widely acclaimed short story “Borges and I” (*Labyrinths* 282-283) where he presents his self and the writer’s self in concentric circles supplementing each other and at the same time preserving their identities in a non-dualistic unity. Borges concludes the story thus: “I do not know which of us has written this page” (283). The same urge causes Molloy, as he confronts the presence of his own indeterminable existence, to fade into anonymity and to suggest: “And even my sense of identity was wrapped in namelessness often hard to penetrate” (*Molloy* 31). He has to refer to himself, in order to temporarily fix himself, as if he was another. “Yet it sometimes happens and will sometimes happen again that I forget who I am and strut before my
eyes, like a stranger’ (Molloy 44). This co-existence leads to an absence, which is not in opposition to presence. Rather, it questions the status and identity of the existence. Instead of pointing to a complete erasure of human existence and a substitution to it, Foucault alludes to an indiscernible yet sudden fading away of the sign ‘man’ hitherto harbored within the logic of the phenomenology of existence. The sign ‘man’ is not replaceable though its status has always been problematic, but rather renegotiable. A becoming appropriates it, which is non-Hegelian in that it does not engage the preservation and inhibition of the ‘other’ but remains suspended within the philosophical quest concerning the nature of being.

This boundless becoming amounts to a writing liberated from the regulations of representation. In postmodernity there is a rhetorical movement internal to language redefining the space and status of representation that literally puts language out of itself. The question of ‘man’ is raised in relation to the problematic of language as a language that refuses to be dominated by him. Even as he articulates language, it shapes him. He himself questions the veracity of the reality presented by language. The problematic of ‘man’ and the problematic of language necessarily involve each other. In Watt, Beckett captures this double process of questioning. Once Watt experiences the discrepancy between language and things, between words and its referents, he comes to doubt his existence as man:
As for himself, though he could no longer call it a man, as he had used to do, with the intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense, yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man [. . .] But for all the relief this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn. (83)

Watt comes to realize that man is a finite structure on its way out. He is a mutating drifter and not a rational self, capable of representing the essence and meaning of his own phenomenological authenticity. Watt cannot master his human nature because man has always already been dehumanised or made other than human. What man shall be tomorrow depends on a fundamental alteration of all the vectors, which, in the classical age of representation, had managed to clutch him within their confines. Fiddling with the reality that unfolds before him at Knott’s house, Watt writes the transgressive text of Watt by overriding the space of fictional representation. The novel as the signified seeks to fit in this space, only to find it uncomfortable there. Watt’s writing turns out to be an unmasking of representation rather than an attempt at representation. His predicament announces the formulation of a writing, which, throughout the trilogy, will serve to defy the dialectic at the point of its legitimisation into absolute meaning. This transgressive practice places Beckett firmly within postmodern
literature and its subversion of the language and space of representation.

For Foucault, a feasible methodology capable of subverting the Hegelian dialectics and activating the disintegration of representation ensues with the advent of postmodern literature. In “The Thought of the Outside” (148-169), he relates this to an internal disturbance arising within language and a shift that puts language out of itself. As a result, the entire space of representation is appropriated by an action that apparently strikes from the outside but in actuality takes place within the most private recesses of that space. Postmodern literature is equated with the development of this transgressive writing. It brings about a radical difference to the space of representation by reconfiguring the relationship of the self with the ‘other’. Liberated from the closure of the dialectic and stimulated by the freedom of infinite difference, postmodern literature re-inscribes disparity within identity, the universal within the singular, and the infinite within the finite. The subservience to dialectical epistemology is repealed and the production of meaning and knowledge is consummated within the larger configuration of non-dialectical differentiation.

Postmodern literature shows that the Hegelian epistemology achieves closure and actualises its own identity through an act of conceptual difference or absolute passage into the ‘other’. It has to create an object, a distinct ‘other’, outside itself to institute itself as a
full-fledged being. Being inscribes itself only in opposition to non-being. The self then becomes the centre and is expressed as the logos through the language it uses. Postmodern literature epitomizes the elimination of this Hegelian unified self and its passage into language. This transgressive act of writing disinters the bizarre intimacy that exists between the self and the word and is, in turn, instrumental in engineering the rupture of the self.

Hegelian dialectics legitimises the dialectical transaction between the personal and the impersonal, between absolute reason and absolute madness. It is privileged by the concepts of reason and representational language. Derrida calls the kind of writing based on dialectical epistemology "minor writing" which, according to him, puts forth conceptual difference in accordance with the laws of organic representation. Diametrically opposite of this restricted writing, but appropriating and exceeding it, is the practice of "major writing" ("From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve" 257-258) that could be equated with postmodern literature. Major writing tries to eschew the strictures of organic difference (conceptual difference) and embraces the more democratic course of the real difference (orgic difference). The exposition of the distinction between these two differences and the elaboration of the Deleuzian concept of orgic difference will be attempted in the next chapter.
According to Derrida, otherness is recognized and mastered and the possibility of self-presence based on the model of the same established, in Hegel's narrative, through "the work of the dialectic" ("From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism with out Reserve" 265). The phenomenological framework of identity thus produced promises the system of representation the endless retrieval of self-presence at all the points of its progression towards infinity. Here, writing is involved in the recovery and perpetuation of a space that has always already been written. At the same time, writing is also enslaved to this model in that it is forced to function as the transparent medium of an essence that has already been constituted prior to it. In this metaphysical model, writing misses the immanence of truth and reality, as they had been constituted before its inception. Thought relegates writing to a secondary status so that the possibility of self-presence and infinite self-representation are ensured. Vast regions of what is not thought continue to be conceptually filled with thought's own expanding self-understanding. All future representations are thus predictable and could be replicated. Their meaning could be ascertained and their contents made to function independently of their form.

Samuel Beckett challenges the self-centred totalitarian logic of the system of representation. He does so by encapsulating, through self-reflexive strategies like parody, the textual practises that form an
alternative to representation. He proposes a paradoxical logic, by way of epistemological and narrative acts of transgression, to override the repressive model at work in representation.

Beckett's novels belong to the league of Derridian 'major writing' that engages a certain textuality operating at a differential level to activate multiplicity. They subvert the dialectics underpinning the classical model of representation by re-inscribing within it an internal alterity of silence, which exhausts the space of memory and retention through forgetting. This process triggers concepts of otherness and difference that are radically different from the structures of Hegelian logic.

As we saw earlier, Western thought has to objectify itself as a fixed and tenable object to bridge the gap between thought and its expression and to be adequate to its own self-representation as the subject. It is thus involved in an act of exteriorisation mediated through inscription. In order to actualise itself it has to know and represent itself. This operation demands the process of differentiation (which will be discussed in detail in chapter II). Thought should be able to identify and fix its own difference in opposition to what it is not. The Hegelian dialectic of absence and presence is at work here; immanence or presence is affirmed by a negating absence. Such a positive inscription of thought requires minor writing which functions dialectically and has the ability to trace conceptual self-difference all
the while erasing the non-self. The subject-object dyad is the result of this operation. The act of ‘minor’ writing constitutes a certain dialectical relation with alterity and negativity that allows it to reassert its positive identity in the confrontation with the ‘other’.

Self-perception is rooted in the operation of inscription. But in minor writing, any mediating inscription is immediately erased or relegated to a secondary status because self-consciousness and self-presence demands the graphic identification and the perfect reproduction of the self by itself. In other words, there should be an unproblematic and spontaneous passage of the self into its sign. In Beckett’s fiction, the problematization of this space of minor writing or representation begins with the foregrounding of the act of writing. It can be seen in Watt’s graphic production of simulacra overloading the space of representation. It continues through Molloy’s awareness of his multilayered existence where he as the subject is the product of the text produced by his double Moran. In *Malone Dies* the narrator turns out to be a figment of his own imagination fashioned by the narratives he devices. Beckett is always in the hunt for the ever-elusive virtual reality text that can capture the nuances of creative production. In this quest, he exploits the paradoxes and incongruities of classical and modernist representations by resolutely installing them as an integral part of the narrative.
Beckett also includes the awareness of the lack and the excess inherent in the practice of inscription in the narrative. Beckett’s text starts at an original void, capturing the absence at the inception of writing and then works its way forward by creating and disseminating words to cram that void. In the case of Beckett this linguistic activity, paradoxically, serves only to demolish the edifice of language and the discourse of conceptual difference that support the metaphysical process of representation.

The concurrence of thought with its representation or of reality with its representation can only be realized through orgic difference at the very inception of being. As Derrida points out in the “Différance” (Margins of Philosophy 3-27) difference as being either prohibits the possibility of the simple direct representation of reality based on conceptual difference or makes representation part of a larger deployment of absolute difference. The representation of reality in its absolute difference invites an inscription based on divergences and multiplicities. The moment of inscription, then, exceeds and eludes the phenomenological space, which articulates the representational dialectics of subjective presence and objective comprehension. This is precisely what the postmodern author discovers. In order to stick to conceptual difference and positive representation both thought and reality are forced to disown their (indispensable) passage through orgic difference.
The inscription of consciousness is an example of the process through which major writing transgresses the dialectics of minor writing. In Beckett, consciousness is the activity through which thought writes itself in relation to what is not thought. The Unconsciousness or the ‘not-thought’ is integrated within the process of inscription itself. In the world of classical and modernist representation, memory serves as the material agency through which the consciousness/un-consciousness binary is temporally conserved. Memory suppresses un-consciousness to facilitate the smooth passage of consciousness into the narrative. In *Molloy* the expression of un-consciousness becomes an act of self-representation. Beckett refuses to consider consciousness, locked in a dialectical binary with its alterity the unconsciousness, as the stockroom of knowledge. In minor writing, the consciousness is signified as the self or a name so that it can be fixed, stored and retrieved. For Molloy, this act of signification is just a trick that fails to capture the real substance of consciousness. In the textual movement impelled by the excess of nonsense and the lack of fixed origin, consciousness presents itself as a variable state of differences that resist conceptual taming. It becomes an inscription within writing, in the form of an internal alterity, the meaning of which cannot be realized through any binary link with a dialectical opposite outside itself. In this writing, consciousness becomes an orgic becoming to be comprehended within non-sense. In *Molloy*. 
remembrance is always entwined with forgetting thereby reducing the
very act of narration to an indistinct and illusory practice. Narration is
often dubbed as capricious; advertised as an invention or regarded as
the result of a choice beyond the narrator’s ken. Malone declares “Live
and invent. I have tried. I must have tried. Invent. It is not the word.
Neither is live. No matter. I have tried” (220). The “talking ball” (357)
in *The Unnamable* confesses:

> I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me
to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on the
road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining
ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the
long run making headway. All lies. I have nothing to do,
that is to say nothing in particular. I have to speak,
whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but
the words of others, I have to speak. (357)

There are instances where the presence of reality is dependent on the
mechanical repetition of words. The act of repetition endows a sense of
reality to the narrator who hangs on to them as the final attempt before
the advent of the all-permeating silence. Yet they only serve to
highlight the inevitable (*The Unnamable* 475-476). As characterised by
Molloy’s haphazard recall of events, the sea of forgetting that eats
away the plains of knowledge and representation encircles memory.
Beckett contests minor writing as susceptible to erasure and
exhaustion. Malone mutters off and on, as if they are punctuations to his narratives, “What tedium” (212,214,245,247).

In Watt and Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable and How It Is there are inexplicable gaps, voids, silences, amnesia and verbal farragoes that induce the process of recollection and narration to disintegrate. The Unnamable explains: “Gaps, there have always been gaps, it’s the voice stopping, it’s the voice failing to carry to me” (422). They serve only to punctuate the larger gap of silence from which memories are wrestled out. Words are merely manoeuvres to plug up temporarily the gaps in the narrative. Moreover, they fail to reinstate the original equilibrium between essence and its representation. There are always too many words and a proliferation of disjointed memories that jeopardize reality and memory through differential representation. Molloy, for example, is unable to distinguish between the various segments of his past life or the various people infesting his memory. He is unable to comprehend whether those events were different real occasions or the same occasion repeated differently. Ruminating over the encounters with the various women in his life, Molloy confesses: “And there are days, like this evening, when my memory confuses them and I am tempted to think of them as one and the same old hag, flattened and crazed by life” (63).

The discourse of representation categorizes and conceptualises difference. It uses difference to preserve the distance between
categories and ideas so that they can be identified, measured and contained within the limits of the phenomenology of meaning. Once the zone of meaning is defined in this manner, difference can be replicated at will through mechanical repetition. This is precisely what Molloy fails do. His failure at the organic ordering of difference forces him to adopt a narrative strategy, which, unfortunately, either supersedes his control through proliferation or submits him to the overtures of verbal silence. This logistical failure points to a definitive transgression of Hegelian dialectics. As a result, a subversive silence prevails over meaning and sound. Epistemological meaning is problematized as conceptual difference is superseded. Representation is ceaselessly subjected to the manifest process of infinite digression. For Beckett, this is the very moment and the modus operandi of writing. As Molloy illustrates, the novel is immediately located in a space of epistemological silence or is let loose in the prefecture of sense where sense, actually, functions within non-sense and resists incorporation into absolute meaning. Molloy can never hope to actualise himself. He is forever dispossessed, continually made ‘other’ and is inscribed always as the ‘other’. His efforts at self-reflection fail to enforce the closure, which brings meaning and identity into being, and become transformational acts that alter the very object that they try to explore. In reality, this writing demonstrates the movement of difference itself—its repeated yet indistinguishable patterns of figuration.
Beckett’s postmodern writing posits and simultaneously contests narrated difference. It challenges the space of hypothesized negative affirmation that allows dialectical movement to expound meaning. Beckett’s writing thus transgresses the negation of negativity that dialectics executes in order to resolve its internal self-difference and bring out positive knowledge. The ‘other’ is not an external binary opposite to the “I” but is an internal double and is beyond the purview of any methodology based on presence and identity. Knott, for example, needs nothing except a witness to his not needing. This demands “an other” (another)—here the narrator in charge of narrating him and inscribing his presence in the narration itself. As a result, Knott is put at the mercy of the bad witness/narrator Watt who contemplates too much on the position of his referent and on the language he is forced to employ to represent him. Consequently, Watt is bound to misrepresent him. He cannot represent Knott as the fixed guarantor (the centre) of the house and, thus, fails to establish the conceptual difference between Knott and his possessions and the resultant dominance he has established over them. Instead, Knott is presented as the variable point of difference and the house as the radical other. This space of alterity forever reorganises Knott according to the events and the temporal series that shake its walls and its occupants.
Beckett shows that representation is engaged in the production of a series of fake inscriptions, which serves only to supplement the lack. Moreover, the legitimating of the act of representation is undermined by the very fact that it has nothing to rely on but its own power of invention. It is fiction masquerading as reality. This awareness challenges the order of representation based on the chartering and recuperation of the identical. The process of representation—that would convert Watt’s account of his stay in Knott’s house into an unproblematic reality on which the novel is constructed—is forever deferred and is always actualised as other than itself.

Hegelian dialectics also stands for the negotiation of the act of representation through the process of self-difference and the ostensible negativity of the ‘other’. It eventually seeks to link this practice to a certain backgrounding of language. This dialectical economy, designed to preserve self-identity through negativity, is in fact restricted and countermanded by a non-Hegelian movement whose paradoxical logic questions the internal distinctiveness of thought and jeopardizes self-identification and organic representation. The overcoming of the language of dialectics and the phenomenological model of epistemology has necessitated the emergence of orgic forms that resist the taming by organic representation. This in short is the theoretical basis of the narrative act of transgression, which postmodern novelists in general and Samuel Beckett in particular performs.
Many modernist novelists, though disruptive at some level, ultimately choose the Hegelian methodology and through a process of dialectics return to the traditional model of representation. On the other hand, Beckett takes Hegel on a postmodernist journey. It is a moment when the neat contours of what we had taken for granted as concrete and recognisable start melting and begin multiplying on themselves, when ignorance and humility etch the sign of ‘otherness’ permanently on the palimpsest of identity. Samuel Beckett’s practice of this transgressive act in his major novels is the substance of the next section.

II

*The rascal, he is getting humanized.*

*Watt*

Beckett’s transgressive writing reproduces the moment when thought comes face to face with a language that is private and strange, both eager and defiant. It reminds us of Foucault’s declaration that we are closer to the possibility of a “non-dialectical form of philosophical language” (“A Preface to Transgression” 84). A self-reflexive non-authoritarian language will supersede the language of philosophy rooted in dialectical epistemology. For Foucault, the postmodern...
problematic of language is “tied to the still silent and groping apparition of a form of thought in which the interrogation of the limit replaces the search for totality and the act of transgression replaces the movement of contradictions” (“A Preface to Transgression” 85). Transgression interrogates the mode of organic representation omnipresent in the Hegelian system by dismissing all binaries produced by acts of closure and identification through separation. Affirming the limitlessness of difference, transgression escapes the inherent negativity of dialectics and its actualisation of reality through the restriction imposed on the play of difference.

Foucault’s theorisation of the concepts of transgression and limit facilitates a fresh insight into the texts of Samuel Beckett. Beckett’s writings emphasize non-sense, powerlessness and humility as possible human qualities at a time when the western world continues to assert a foolhardy confidence in its material success, lofty aspirations and its self-professed virtues.

Beckett’s transgression of language works to undermine the edifice of representation and the mediating logic of dialectics. He captures the domain of uncertainty where, in Foucault’s words from the “A Preface to Transgression,” certainties “are immediately upset so that thought is ineffectual as soon as it attempts to seize them” (75). Reality becomes an ungraspable dimension, which cannot be separated from the tortuous passage of thought itself. As we will see later in the
detailed analysis of Molloy, thought extends beyond the limits set by sense and seem to function under a different set of rules it cannot understand let alone control. The voice in The Unnamable is an intimate and solipsistic register. However, it has to be publicly expressed in an alien language all the while remaining the very private expression of an individual experience.

In Beckett’s texts, thought is imminent in a language that fails it but at the same time owns it by dispossessing thought of itself. This interior space is fundamentally transgressive as it disengages the basic system of oppositions regulating the dialectical space essential for the metaphysical representation of reality. It is neither subjective nor objective, neither inside nor outside. It is the site of a transgressive act of difference destabilizing all binary opposites.

Beckett’s transgressive inscription presents the passage of the limit into the limitless and depicts the moment when the act of measuring performed by the limit is incapacitated by an immeasurable encounter with the liminal. The consequence of the questioning of limits is the dissolution of the exteriority of being and the subsequent denial of universality. The resultant interiority does not stand in simple contrast to exteriority but personifies the movement of transgression, which reconfigures the difference between interiority and exteriority. It activates the limitless play of difference that brings limit to oscillate between appearance and disappearance. Thought
institutes the limit. Nevertheless, in its self-reflexive stage it brings limit into the unlimited by forcing thought to represent itself as limit. According to Foucault,

The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable [. . .]. Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall.

(“A Preface to Transgression” 84)

Beckett’s writing does not institute other limits to set up alternative orders of being. Instead, it presents the transgressive economy of difference by constituting and then exceeding the limit. His strategy is to make the limit aware of itself as limit and then lead it to the understanding that the moment of self-awareness is immeasurable as it belongs to the orgic movement. This transgressive action will affect the subject as well as the object. The subject will cross over to ignorance, and humility form the vantage point of the all-seeing, all-
knowing, authorial ‘I’. The object will regain its real status as the ungraspable and the incommensurable.

In Beckett, this moment is tantamount to the acknowledgment of the basic unrecognizability of reality. For example, the Unnamable (the name itself is suggestive of the predicament of the narrative voice) is able to identify himself/itself as an individual only through the closure effected by the linguistic process of naming himself/itself. Instead of the forced concurrence between the sign and the signified, to the exclusion of all other possibilities, the voice of The Unnamable is forever caught in delays and confusion about his/its own identity:

Who make me say that I can’t be Worm, the inexpungable.
Who make me say that I am he perhaps, as they are. Who make me say that since I can’t be he I must be he. That since I couldn’t be Mahood, as I might have been, I must be Worm, as I cannot be. But is it still they who say that when I have failed to be Worm I’ll be Mahood, automatically, on the rebound? (397)

Molloy who “had been living so far from words so long” (31) too is caught in a similar situation. Failing to recollect the name of his town, he laments:

And even my sense of identity was wrapped on a namelessness often hard to penetrate [. . .] there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless
names. I say that now, but after all what do I know about then, now when icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, fouly named. (31)

What the Watts, the Molloys, and the Unnamables of the Beckettian world discover is the rupture between language and the discourse of metaphysics. By fixing their identities as/and their names, they are in fact marking the non-identity or alterity that is operational within all acts of self-identification through language. Beckett recognizes the futility of all acts of naming. When Molloy finally recollects his name during the interrogation at the police station (20-21) the act becomes a transgressive parody of the representation of the simple externality of reality and being, even as it acknowledges the undeniable world of representation. The subtle parody cancels out the natural and automatic legitimisation of meaning enforced through naming.

It has to be kept in mind that in Beckett the transgression of metaphysics and representation does not lead to the creation of an entirely new and better-equipped language. The constitution of such universals and master-narratives is not the purpose of Samuel Beckett’s postmodernist fictions. Jacques Derrida explains in “Force and Signification” that any transgression will be a strategy that essentially remains within the given set of linguistic and metaphysical options and that:
Emancipation from this language must be attempted. But not as an attempt at emancipation from it, for this is impossible unless we forget our history. Rather, as the dream of emancipation. Nor as emancipation from it, which would be meaningless and would deprive us of light of meaning. Rather, as resistance to it, as far as is possible. (28)

Beckett takes part in a transgressive act of language by activating and at the same time interrogating the presented language of representation from within. It is the internal transgression of that language as well as a displacement of the scene of representation presented through that language. It has to be borne in mind that all these incursions take place within the boundaries imprinted by the closure of representation. Transgression involves, among its many facets, a parodic repetition of the act of limitation or measuring performed by this closure. Another movement that forces this act to encounter the presence of the unlimited or the immeasurable also overshadows it. The immeasurable, however, should not be regarded as a transcendental entity but as the internal, limitless, multiple possibilities of its own act of limiting to which it is actually subjugated and about which it is ignorant. All these movements ultimately come together to form a transgressive reading of the functions of the limit within representation. The limit then becomes the boundary which is not fixed organically (conceptually)
but which is prompted by orgic difference, and which displaces indefinitely the limits it imposes through the act of limiting. This implies a confrontation where instead of the blind negation of what it opposes, as in the case of dialectical thinking, the problematization and reconfiguration of the binaries of western thought, especially the inside outside duality expressed through representation, happens. Foucault sums up in “A Preface to Transgression,”

Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. (35)

The novel Watt provides an illustration of this transgressive act in Watt’s musings on the dog. After solving the puzzle of the dog by composing a story that can pass for reality Watt decides to test the very boundaries that he himself has formulated. As part of the feeding process of the dog, Watt has to witness the consumption of the food by the dog brought to Mr. Knott’s house by Art and Con (113-115). He decides to alter the rules of this game. Instead of personally witnessing this rather boring reproduction of the same reality, he leaves the dish containing the food by the door along with a lamp, which can act as a beacon to Art and Con. He then goes on to occupy himself with other matters. Watt’s transgression of the rules of the house becomes an act
that introduces difference within the same. It is not a real act performed by an assumed subject in order to disrupt from the outside an established reality but is a fictitious act which intervenes (so as to contest it) within the fiction that has been finally decided upon by Watt as the true reality regarding the matter of the dog. Watt’s transgression reshuffles internally the very space of representation that he himself has framed. This decision makes him actively implanted within his own fiction about reality. It is impelled by a self-reflective strategy based on the repetition of the act of writing. The reiteration enforces a representative closure and at the same time questions and transgresses it. It is an internal tinkering, a subversive movement that does not threaten to replace totally the existing reality but to keep it always on the edge of renovation. Watt’s transgression is an almost involuntary act, which brings into mind Molloy’s inability to fit in with the natural world. “It was I who was not natural enough to enter into that order of things, and appreciate its niceties” (Molloy 46). Whereas Molloy elects, as a rule, not to act or succumb immediately to compulsion as he is given to endless reflection of his own urges, Watt yields to its call though not without the premonition of impending disaster:

And this was a great source of wonder, to Watt, that he had infringed, with impunity, such a venerable tradition, or institution. But he was not so foolish as to found in this a principle of conduct, or a precedent of rebelliousness, ho
no, for Watt was only too willing to do as he was told, and as custom required, at all times. And when he was forced to transgress, as in the matter of witnessing the dog's meal, then he was at pains to transgress in such a way, and to surround his transgression with such precautions, such delicacies, that it was almost as though he had not transgressed at all. (Watt 116)

Watt’s self-contested rebellion becomes a very personal act of repetition underlining the fact that any represented reality is related to subjective interrogations. It further testifies to the fact that right from the inception the force of resistance is present within the system and that it is this transgressive resistance that animates the laws, the limits, the resistances and the disruptions involved in the act of narrative representation. The resistance reshuffles completely the scene of representation by activating the moment of indecision. Nevertheless, this transgressive resistance is not the prerogative of a subject which can actively generate a wilful rebellion. The subject, in turn, becomes what is repeated in a displaced manner, an involuntary site where the process of liberation occurring within language is played out. Subjectivity does not embody an autonomous speaking individual but is inscribed within the decentred subject positions which do not enforce narrative closure and which are not narrated in full by the language of representation. Thus, the production of narrative in
**Watt** implies the invention of a hypothetical reality, which attempts to progress arbitrarily to the, forever elusive, final reality and, thus, is transgressive in nature.

The failure of dialectics to support a system of representation capable of comprehending the totality of being suggests an aporia. It is a point of absolute contradiction, which seems insurmountable because it is inscribed within the very logic governing the discourse of representation. Hegelian dialectics overcame the aporia by cancelling the paradox that contains it, and representing it as mere contradiction. Contradiction was privileged over paradox even as paradox is more complex than contradiction. It is deeper and, paradoxically, more superficial as it plays more at the surface than does contradiction. The logic of paradox subverts dialectics and the taming of difference through contradiction. It resists and exceeds the version of meaning presented in representation, affirming difference in the place of the negation proposed by dialectics.

Beckett’s text returns us to the primacy of the paradox over contradiction and highlights the affinity that thought has with paradox. The contestation of the dialectics of representation helps him to recover the force of the paradox present in the very production of meaning. Beckett’s text is transgressive in the sense that it reaches into the paradox attendant on the birth of thought without purporting to resolve it through dialectics.
In Becket, non-resolution—the impossibility to decide between two opposite tendencies—is figured as a kind of paralysis obstructing comprehension and communication. It corresponds to an instance of doubt that blocks the process through which meaning is made immanent. In *Watt*, it is personified as Watt, who is about to leave Knott’s house and yet suddenly stops in his tracks as he makes for the door:

So he stopped, but he did not stop far, for hardly had the stop begun, when it ended, and hardly had he initiated this program of repose, of uneasy repose, when he checked it, and remained fixed, in an aggravation of his semi-upright station. (222)

Earlier in *Watt*, it has been pointed out that Watt’s indecision stemmed from the presence of too many possible actions of contrary nature in his negotiation of a way out of the house. He could have (1) shut the door and set his bags down, (2) shut the door without setting the bags down, (3) set down the bags without bothering to shut the door, or (4) leave things as they were, etc., etc. The contradictions cannot be resolved by choosing one possibility. They coagulate to form a palimpsest where all possibilities co-exist without mutual exclusion or overlapping. Though they retain their difference without invalidating each other their differences are not hierarchically structured and therefore cannot be classified, measured or quantified.
And the conclusion of Watt’s reflections was this, that if one of these things was worth doing, all were worth doing, but that none was worth doing, no, not one, but that all were unadvisable, without exception. (221)

The proliferation of possibilities, all equally valid or invalid, is enough to stop Watt from selecting a positive course of action. It also forces him to examine the decision making process that usually offers the right course of action in such dilemmas. The legitimacy of the concept of correctness itself is questioned through his reflections. He delays the moment of decision so that the closure associated with representational narrative is upset and in its place is triggered the production of plenitude. In the seamless space of multiplicity, all possibilities exist simultaneously without any individual choice privileged or ranked over the others. Either they cancel each other out and bring on silence or they create a surplus of virtual, and never exhausted, possibilities.

In Beckett, a sense of neutrality integral to the process of transgression allows the paradoxical to establish precedence over contradiction. The production of meaning is derailed because the closure enforced by representation is obstructed as meaning and thought are transported to the realm of the incommensurable, which lies beyond phenomenological strictures.
This obstruction is a crucial step in the destabilization of representation through resistance. It reintroduces difference in the production of self-identity and causes the dissolution and a subsequent reorganisation of the space of representation into an unrepresentable level of orgic difference. **Watt** constantly tries to play down the acquiescence to classical representation in order to emerge into a space of difference. The space is a limbo, a space in between: “Or is there a coming that is not a coming to, a going that is not a going from, a shadow that is not the shadow of purpose, or not?”(58). Thought and meaning are placed beyond the ambit of conceptual framing which would have made them representable. However, any breach of representation serves as a reminder of representation and to the moment of obstruction described earlier. Representation is never totally superseded nor is another methodology installed in its place. It is persistently exhausted and revamped. This going beyond is not a simple leaving behind of old space to emerge into a new one but is rather an internal alteration and reorganization of that space itself. In order to comprehend such an operation we should look beyond traditional concepts generally applied to fiction. Samuel Beckett warns that the objective of fiction, contrary to the orthodox western notions of textual progress, is very ambivalent. Molloy says:

> Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are
escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, as it is wept. (32)

Beckett’s resistance of the representational mode often results in a constantly renewed problematization of meaning. In traditional representation of reality, meaning is restricted to the space of common sense and dialectical methodology as it precludes all other possibilities through the dissolution of paradoxes and orgic differences. A universal edifice of meaning is erected and concurrently the logic of meaning built on rationality is given a fillip through writing that establishes its legitimacy through the process of dialectics.

The ‘other’ is not simply assimilated by the ‘same’ nor does it stand in simple opposition to it. Rather, it amounts to a wealth of difference within the same, an abundance that prevents the closure of the same. Paradox is a gap that overwhelms the process by which otherness is resolved and integrated into self-identity. It assumes the form of a withdrawal, a refusal to complete the closure of meaning and a disruption of the dialectical process, within the text. The refusal of Watt to act according to the principles presented as natural or self-evident in representation shows his allegiance to another hierarchy. This order is not given to the recovery of the ‘same’. Rather it points to the destabilisation of the ‘same’ through a passage into an internal alterity. Deleuze says:
There is a hierarchy which measures being according to their limits, and according to their degree of proximity or distance from a principle. But there is also a hierarchy which considers things and beings from the point of view of power: it is not a question of considering absolute degrees of power, but only of knowing whether a being eventually ‘leaps over’ or transcends its limits in going to the limit of what it can do, whatever its degree. ‘To the limit’, it will be argued, still presupposes a limit. Here, limit [peras] no longer refers to what maintains the being under a law, nor to what delimits or separates it from other things. On the contrary, it refers to that on the basis of which it is deployed and deploys all its power; hubris ceases to be simply condemnable and the smallest becomes equivalent to the largest once it is not separated from what it can do. (Difference and Repetition 37)

What Deleuze suggests is that there is a power contesting the basic principles of representation. This power is embedded in the principle and, in a transgressive fashion, causes it to work against itself. Molloy refers to a comparable mechanism of self-opposition and self-resistance when he talks about the guiding principles of narration (here the drawing up of a list of his possessions):
For it is natural I should dilate at lesser length on what I
lost than on what I could not lose, that goes without
saying. And if I do not always appear to observe this
principle it is because it escapes me, from time to time,
and vanishes, as utterly as if I had never educed it. (48)

The failure of ‘guiding principles’ to systematize reality under organic
difference engenders, in the words of Arsene in Watt, the “existence
off the ladder” (44). According to Molloy it leads to:

Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not
to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never
stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in
mind, even in the heat of composition. (27)

When the grand narratives fail to guide narration in a linear direction,
the possibility of unequivocal action is discounted and singularity
multiplied beyond any resolution. Torn between plenitude and lack of
choice (like Watt trying to solve the puzzle of his existence in Knott’s
house) the subject fails to reach a decision. The best example of this
aporia could be found in the following passage from The Unnamable
where the ‘voice’ is describing his unenviable predicament:

The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may
speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things
which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more
interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more
interesting, that I have to, I forgot, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never. (332)

The inability to resolve the problematic of representation and enforce a closure to the act represents a commanding critique of the way western thinking resolves such conflicts. By relegating themselves to the limbo of the forever differentiated, by privileging contemplation over action, Beckett’s texts delay the process of actualisation. Contemplation is never offered as a more authentic instance of awareness leading to a higher truth but is always presented as an action blind to its own motives and constantly obliterated by the act of inscription into the text. It delays and temporarily defuses action. A very powerful and explicit dramatisation of the aporia could be found in Waiting for Godot.

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let’s go.

(They do not move.).

[The Complete Dramatic Works 87]

Words are not matched by action. The declaration ‘let’s go’ serves only to neutralize the physical action of moving instead of triggering it and supplementing it. Contemplation (thought) remains ignorant and diffusing because it cannot claim to be capable of judging a chosen
course of action as authentic. Consider the instance where Molloy talks of the training he got in good manners (which, sadly, he lacks):

On this subject, I had only negative and empirical notions, which means that I am in the dark, most of the time, and all the more completely as a lifetime of observations had left me doubting the possibility of systematic decorum, even within a limited area. But it is only since I have ceased to live that I think of these things and other things. It is in the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life, and that I judge it, as it is said that God will judge me, and with no less impertinence. (24)

This hesitation, gap or aporia suggests passivity at work within the activity of representation and it problematizes the distinction between activity and passivity. As thought attempts to represent and unify itself as a dialectical opposite to an objective reality, it is forever fractured by the very same act of inscription. Writing becomes more of an impediment than a facilitating act. Representation is blocked before it can achieve its conclusion; it is displaced, alienated from itself and transgressed.

This approach betrays a radical shift in the operation of thought, which ultimately results in the demise of representation. Arsene’s account of what had elapsed during his stay in Knott’s house expresses
a similar epistemological shift—a change “other than a change of
degree” (Watt 44). It is a change affecting the inner consciousness as
well as the outside world, the result of a surreptitious and
transgressive act.

It was a slip like that I felt that Tuesday afternoon,
millions of little things moving all together out of their
old place, into a new one nearby, and furtively, as though
it were forbidden [. . .] For my—how shall I say? —my
personal system was so distended at the period of which I
speak that the distinction between what was inside it and
what was outside it was not at all easy to draw. Everything
that happened happened inside it, and at the same time
everything that happened happened outside it. (Watt 43)

The change illustrated expresses a new relationship between inside and
outside, a new link between subject and object, a new space for
thought corresponding to the ‘thought of the outside’ and ultimately
articulates the transgressive character of Beckett’s texts in general.

It should be noted that the transformation expressed by Arsene is
pronounced as transgression (“as though it were forbidden”). It is a
“slip” from an old place into a new one amounting to a rewriting over
an old script rather than a substitution of it by a completely new text.
The text then becomes a palimpsest. The new language emerging out of
the transgressive act will not be the result of the invention of another
language. It will cause a slippage within the old language to suggest forms of thinking and being that are ‘other’ to this language so that “everything that happens happens inside it, and at the same time everything that happens happens outside it”

Arsene’s speech embodies a reality where the old subject/object duality, the root of traditional representation, is dissipated and transformed into an ambiguous space that reorganizes the relationship between the inside and the outside. The world, representation’s factual referent, appears within thought’s self-contemplation as the ‘other’ that prevents thought from coinciding with its own reflection instead of presenting itself as the objective external reality.

In classical representation, the subject-object duality organises a certain spatial distribution that organises reality in terms of the inside-outside model. The absolute subject faces the objectivity of the world already organised and identified. The concept of the unrepresentable thought subverts this phenomenological model. The same ambiguity between objective and subjective realities is expressed at the start of Molloy. Are the characters independent of Molloy the narrator as he purports them to be? Alternatively, are they figments of his imagination? Molloy states: “Perhaps I’m inventing a little [. . .]. But perhaps I’m remembering things” (5). In any case what referential space do they occupy? Molloy’s fascination for them verges on a physical attraction even as they are discounted as mere fabrications.
The narrator /character Molloy appears as an object as substantial as the other characters, to be disowned or preserved according to the fancy of the author, thereby problematizing the concept of the author. The subjective and the objective realms are subjected to constant reversals and refigurations. This makes their position within the narrative relatively ambiguous and discordant. For instance, the appearance and disappearance of A and B as objects to be observed seems to rely on whether or not Molloy chooses to or is forced to observe them:

From things about to disappear I turn away in time. To watch them out of sight, no, I can’t do it. It was in this sense he disappeared. Looking away I thought of him, saying, He is dwindling, dwindling, dwindling. (9)

The Unnamable calls himself the “teller and the told” (352). The best example of this confusion appears in plain language in the short fictional piece Company. The protagonist calls himself the Device of the voice and of its hearer and of himself.

Devise of himself for Company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself. He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company. Leave it at that. Confusion too is company up to a point. (34)
Later he would call himself the “Devised deviser, devising it all for company” (64).

The resistance of the object to any attempt at representation is concomitant with the reticence of the subject to master (and name) its object as a peripheral reality. The object is designated as an intangible ‘other’ registering within thought. In this process, the subject and the object become so entwined that even when they miss each other it is tough to distinguish the one from the other:

I watched him recede, overtaken (myself) by his anxiety, at least by an anxiety which was not necessarily his, but of which as it were he partook. Who knows if it was my own anxiety overtaking him. (Molloy 7)

The subject and the object fail to achieve separate and well-defined identities or accomplish unrestrained unification. It is not a field of resolution where dialectical oppositions fuse together, but a domain of multiplicities where divergences and diversities form a differential unity. This tactic generates a decisive fracture in the dialectical edifice of representation. Deleuze sums up:

Oppositions are roughly cut from a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities. Nor is it primarily a question of dissolving
tensions in the identical, but rather of distributing the disparities in a multiplicity. (50)

Beckett’s fiction debunks the subject/object polarity at work in representation and highlights the absence of dialectical bond between them. The Beckettian subject alienated from the outside world and incapable of comprehending it, let alone controlling it or be controlled by it, serves to deflate the phenomenological model which assures affinity and reciprocal relationship between the two realms. Beckett proposes the absence of any meaningful relationship between the subject and the object in the conventional sense thereby demonstrating that a radical otherness is the only possibility. The following passage from *Molloy* highlights the idea:

> But now he knows these hills, that is to say he knows them better, even if ever again he sees them from afar it will be I think with other eyes, and not only that but the within, all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feelings dance their sabbath, all that too quite differently disposed. (6)

It involves another level of knowledge—knowledge of non-knowledge. It is from this humble point of view of ignorance that the notion of multiplicity as singularity can escape its expropriation by the universal.
Beckett's fiction subverts dualities by blocking the procedure by which they function in opposition to one another. His tactic is to force the terms of a dyad to function independently of the hierarchy that defines them so that the system that organizes dialectical opposition in representation is contested.

In Beckett's text, the inside and the outside interweave to perform a radically different role. They become effects of a paradoxical logic of meaning instead of forming a binary. The play of this logic rewrites their relationship within the space of internal difference. The outside becomes that which is embossed inside in the form of a subject, or multiple subjects, or the 'voice'. The Unnamable declares, "But I don't say anything, I don't know anything, these voices are not mine nor these thoughts, but the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me" (397). The inside is figured in terms of the absent or the proliferating object. The phenomenology of meaning at work in the representational model is outdone to devise a different logic of meaning, and language becomes the tentative device that fabricates the new relationship. It is not a simple reversal of the order but a recuperation and expansion of the possibilities already contained within representation. The Unnamable's frantic rendering, without full stops, towards the end of his non-stop solipsistic narrative is a case in point:
I'm in words, made of words, others' words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me, I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I am all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, wherever I go I find me, leave me, go towards me, come from me, nothing ever but me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray, [...] I'm something quite different, a quite different thing, a wordless thing in an empty space, a hard shut dry cold black place, where nothing stirs, nothing speaks[...].

(443)

The ability of the phenomenological subject to experience itself as a pure intelligible essence capable of understanding itself and its world is questioned. The Unnamable, for instance, is torn between the profusion of its own subjectivity and the absence and silence it actually is in the final reckoning. Here Becket is striving to resist the movement through which the subject is legitimated and is made representable.

Malone, Molloy and The Unnamable belong to a non-place that is neither inside nor outside— the space of the liminal. It is the wall that separates and the force that insistently knocks it down.
The transgressive changes that take place in the textual world of Samuel Beckett—spatial, temporal, and epistemological—cannot be described as a simple change of degree under the aegis of the linear progression of the representational narrative. Take for example Arsene's observations:

The sun on the wall, since I was looking at the sun on the wall at the time, underwent an instantaneous and I venture to say radical change of appearance. It was the same wall, or so little older that the difference may safely be disregarded but so changed that I felt I had been transported without having remarked it, to some quite different yard, and to some quite different season, in an unfamiliar country. At the same time my tobacco-pipe, since I was not eating a banana, ceased so completely from the solace to which I was incurred, that I took it out of my mouth to make sure it was a thermometer, or an epileptic’s dental wedge. . . . But in what did the change consist?

What was changed, and how? What was changed, if my information is correct, was the sentiment that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place. (43-44)

There is an abrupt transfer to a condition “quite different” and thus unknown. However, a complete revamping of the level of perception is not intended. It is not a “change of degree”. The attempt is to generate
the plenitude of a differential perception by transporting the domain of non-sense in to its ambience. A case in point is Molloy forgetting his own name at the police station. The familiar is defamiliarized resulting in a sense of disorientation, which questions the ability of language to name objects and in the process legitimise them. That the transformation related by Arsene affects a world already there (the wall) that also appears to be not there (it was not the same wall) suggests a radical experience of difference. The “new” (which is not new, but a simulacra—repetition—of the old) product in that transgressive act is difference itself. In Deleuze’s words:

What becomes established with the new is precisely not the new. For the new—in other words, difference—calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognised and unrecognisable terra incognita. (136)

The ‘unknown land’ exemplified by the radical change of the appearance of the sun on the wall engages forces of orgic difference over the Hegelian model that controls representation through the organic taming of difference. Difference (and repetition) then becomes the tools using which Samuel Becket transgresses the dialectical model of representation in his attempt to create a non-Hegelian identity for the text. In the words of Deleuze: “All identities are only simulated,
produced as an optical ‘effect’ by the more profound game of difference and repetition” (xix).