“You look behind you as you could not then”: Embodied Cognition and Linguistic Confusion in Beckett’s “Heard in the Dark I”

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Abstract
Samuel Beckett’s short story “Heard in the Dark I” points to the significance of the body for the process of reshaping experience and seeing the world afresh. Moreover, the situation that unfolds in the narrative constitutes a breaking with the habitual flow of things and introduces a path to something beyond linguistic meaning. Through the medium of text, the reader will encounter the movements described as if they were performed. That is to say, reading the meticulous descriptions of physical movements in the text forces the reader to engage with, and imaginatively perform, the very motions described. In so doing, Beckett prompts his reader to break with the habitual appropriation of language as a means to try to make “sense” of the text, turning our attention instead towards the body. By heightening the reader’s attention to the body, Beckett manages to return us to the particularity of presentation, and in this sense his texts are wake-up calls to perception.

Key words: Beckett, phenomenology, body, movements, meaning, experience, memory, imagination, habit

> Halfway across the pasture of your beeline to the gap. The unerring feet fast. You look behind you as you could not then and see their trail. A great swerve. Withershins. Almost as if all at once the heart too heavy. In the end too heavy. (Beckett 1990: 15–16)

> It is quite true what philosophy says; that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other principle: that it must be lived forwards. Which principle, the more one thinks it through, ends exactly with the thought that temporal life can never properly be understood precisely because I can at no instant find complete rest in which to adopt a position: backwards. (Kierkegaard 1996: 161)

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I

Published posthumously in 1990, Samuel Beckett's "Heard in the Dark I"[1] belongs to a sequence of writings recalling childhood memories, often revolving around the physical experience of the situations remembered. The story depicts a character stopping midway on his walk through a snowy field, to look back at the trail of footprints he has made in the snow: "A great swerve. Withershins. Almost as if all at once the heart too heavy" (Beckett 1999a: 16). In the narrative "now," the experience is described by the focalising consciousness of a second-person narrator, who, on his back, in a dark room, is giving detailed reports of the event remembered, the setting out from the porch, "having pulled the door gently to behind you" (10), the feet disappearing "and the skirts of your greatcoat come to rest on the surface of the snow" (11). The walking, according to the narrator, is "so familiar to [the] feet that if necessary they could keep at it and sightless with error on arrival of not more than a few feet north or south" (12). The habitual walks in the field are also characterised by a sense of blindness, for the character walks "if not with closed eyes though this as often as not at least with them fixed on the ground before [his] feet" (12). However, on this "last time," the character is unable to continue his walk as the "foot falls unbidden in midstep or next for lift cleaves to the ground bringing the body to a stand" (14–15).

The meticulous descriptions of experience are at the centre of the story. By contrast, the vague allusions to the narrator's life or social situation—for instance, loneliness as indicated by a "father's shade" that is no longer there—seem unable to explicate the significance of these descriptions of movement. Instead, it is the act of imagining the walking, stopping sand finally looking back on the "great swerve" that presents a shape on the ground leads the narrator to formulate an understanding of that shape as expressive of the particularity of these movements—"almost as if all at once the heart too heavy. In the end too heavy" (16). The moment of stopping is highlighted as the moment when the impulse to move leaves the body. Depicted as a memory in the character/narrator's life, the short story constitutes a projection of a moment of stasis or loss (death?), even if the full thrust of this event has been delayed until the "now" that appears in the text, and even if the

[1] All references in this article to "Heard in the Dark I" are from *As the Story Was Told* (Beckett 1999a: 10–16).

insights that the moment brings seemingly emerges out of the text, as we read it.

The character's movements gradually appear as drawings on a canvas, illustrating points and lines that project through the expanse of white snow, finally presenting a shape, along with the invitation to read this shape as expressive of the character's state of mind. The trail "now," appears as an image of despair with the feet projecting a straight line that suddenly falls off its curve. However, this trail was not visible to the character "then," but appears only in the process of going back in memory to re-experience the moment. In addition, the second person narrative prompts the reader to share in the experience of remembering this event, for example, through evoking a sense of the body's weight as the narrator describes "[y]ou," leaning against the door with bowed head before setting out, feet disappearing in the snow and "the skirt of the greatcoat come to rest on the snow" (10). The image of setting out in the snowy field therefore invites the reader to perceive the trail of feet as a path to sensing the experience of walking, stopping and coming to a standstill: heavy-hearted and lost for words, as the convoluted report of visual and kinetic impressions that accompany the image draw the reader into the narrative, through implicating her in this process of remembering. That is to say, reading the descriptions entails going through the motions and perceiving the meticulously described movements as meaningful: they lead us back to what is, perhaps, an authentic moment of resistance in the character's life.

In Samuel Beckett's *oeuvre,* the body—its gestures and movements, as well as the situations and predicaments that determine and/or limit it—is frequently foregrounded to present a stark contrast to language, revealing a fundamental incommensurability between his characters' physical situation, and their linguistic comprehension of that situation. More often than not, the confusion that so many of Beckett's characters experience, grows precisely out of the body's resistance to comply with seemingly intelligible and rational goals, such as walking, sitting, cycling, writing or speaking. In such instances, the body emerges as obstructive, intrusive or recalcitrant to the perceiving consciousness, whether character, narrator or reader. By analogy, "Heard in the Dark I," presents a situation where the body unexpectedly and for no apparent reason refuses to perform its habitual task: suddenly the "the foot falls

unbidden midstep [. . .] bringing the body to a stand" (14): "The unerring feet fast," unable to move on (15).

The situation constitutes a breaking with the habitual flow of things and introduces a path to something beyond linguistic meaning. The body participates in undermining language in Beckett's work, and is consistently made to break with its habitual mode of appearing. Normally, the body, as the means by which human beings access the world, recedes from perception in perception. We do not see the eye seeing, or hear the ear hearing, but eyes and ears withdraw in the act of seeing and hearing to allow that which is seen or heard to appear (Leder 1990: 11). Yet, in Beckett's work, the body is foregrounded to the point where it seems to eclipse the content of the perceiving act. This can be seen also in "Heard in the Dark I," where "you" do not see the trail of feet in the snow or hear the sound of your own footsteps, because "Unhearing and unseeing you go your way. The same way. Day after day" (Beckett 1999a: 13). Nor can "you" talk to yourself into continuing walking, for as "the foot falls unbidden in midstep or next for lift cleaves to the ground bringing the body to a stand," "you" remain a figure of "speechless misgiving [. . .] a speechlessness whereof the gist, Can they go on? Or better, Shall they go on?" (Beckett 1999a: 15).

The body in "Heard in the Dark I" seemingly stands in the way of the character's efforts to control it. But what is at stake in this situation? Is the "gist" of the argument here about "self-control" or agency? Is it "your" duty to move on, or to stop? The two contradictory impulses—wanting to stop but having to move on, and wanting to continue but being unable to do so—frequently emerge in Beckett's work as an essential image of the human condition. Man's inabilities, the propensity for failure, and the misappropriation of effort and aspiration appear in this way as moments of crisis, whereby the body momentarily emerges from the shadows of consciousness where it usually dwells. Moreover, by superimposing the experiences of reader, narrator and character, the confused, lonely figure in the field emerges as a plethora of identities, some "real" some "ideal." Thus, in "Heard in the Dark I," as well as in most of Beckett's creative work, body and mind appear as equal and opposite forces; physical "reality" (here walking and stopping) clashes with linguistic "ideality" (thinking about walking and stopping and constructing it as meaningful in some way), in such a way as to highlight the character's inability to control the situation (life), or make sense of

the experience. Clearly, constructing the walking as a ritual that has to be upheld, although it seemingly has long since lost its significance, points to the deadening effect of habit. But the failure to uphold the ritual ("your" body coming to a standstill), also suggests that "you" are not in control, neither of body nor of mind. In short, life is a "mess," and, as Beckett once famously quipped in an interview with Tom Driver (1961): "[t]o find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now" (qtd in Graver and Federman 1979: 219).

II

"The way being always the same" (Beckett 1999a: 13)

The history of philosophy is rife with debates on the nature of reality, centring on the opposition between the "real" and the "ideal." Already in the early part of 500BC, the Greek Philosopher Parmenides wrote *On Nature*, a challenging poem that has been considered one of the first attempts to "refract the internal opposition between matter and ideas into an internal contradiction within the human mind" (Hawkes 2003: 20). The poem presents two distinct "ways of inquiry" into the nature of reality, as perceived by man, namely: "the way of opinion," which pertains to the world of sense experience ("matter"), and "the way of truth," which relates to the faculty of reason ("ideas") (Hawkes 2003: 21). Sense experience, according to Parmenides, is illusory and inevitably leads to confusion, whereas the rational logical processes of thought have the capacity to convey "what is" or "true reality."[2]

Over time, many artists have also grappled with questions about the nature of reality and perception. For example, Keats's concept of "negative capability" could be seen to problematise precisely such categories as indicated above, in its insistence that man should strive to remain "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 1899: 277). Moreover, the concern of both impressionism and cubism with perception problematises the

[2] Parmenides also gave ethical precedence to the faculty of reason, and since Parmenides, the distinction between "truth" or "falsehood" can be seen to derive precisely from this identification of sense experience with "unreliability," and reasoning with "incontestability" (Hawkes 2003: 20-27). According to David Hawkes, ideology, defined as "false consciousness" derives from this distinction between matter and mind conceptualised as the "real" and the "ideal."

relationship between reality and truth, as does Schoenberg's justification of atonality ("emancipation of dissonance") (Tenney 1988: 2), and Kandinsky's discovery of abstract art (Henry 2009: 16). It would appear that these artists seek to explore the dichotomy of matter and mind, in order to be able to present the relations and structures that made up the artwork more "truthfully." But they also seem to recognise the challenge inherent to understanding the constructed nature of "truth" and "meaning," without necessarily denying, either their own particular "truth" or "meaning," its explanatory power.[3]

Beckett's preoccupation with the body and with perception also testifies to his concern with the philosophical and aesthetic issues addressed, for example, by Kandinsky and Schoenberg. His interest in the Presocratics's effort to try to understand the nature of reality should perhaps be read in the light of such concerns, although John Fletcher claims that "there is nothing to suggest that [Beckett's] interest [in the Presocratics] has ever gone beyond the anecdotal and superficial" (Fletcher 1965: 43). Yet, as Matthew Feldman convincingly argues, Beckett's interest in the Presocratic philosophers goes far beyond the merely anecdotal, as proposed, for example, by John Fletcher. Instead, as Feldman points out: "Beckett [is] asking the same questions of art that the Presocratics were asking of the world" (Feldman 2006: 7).[4]

Already in his 1934 review "Recent Irish Poetry," Beckett begins to identify the "problem of presentation and representation" as a "rupture

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[3] As more contemporary studies in to the nature of embodied cognition have revealed, physical movement is the foundation of intellectual meaning—we are immersed in movement from the moment of conception till the moment we stop breathing. Human meaning making depends on a visceral or intuitive connection with the world (Johnson 2007: 9). It is through the lived experience of a three-dimensional self-moving body that abstract notions of space and time etc. develop—"meaning traffics in patterns, images, qualities, feelings and [only] eventually [in] concepts and propositions" (Johnson 2007: 9). Because of the way in which concepts are founded in the there-dimensional living body, reading movements therefore evoke a kinesthetic response in the reader without us necessarily having to be aware of it because experience and knowledge are not two separate realms of "thinking" but are in fact linked in a complex continuum: moving, thus, is a way of knowing.

[4] Both Beckett's biographer James Knowlson, and Matthew Feldman have documented Samuel Beckett's interest in the Presocratic philosophers (Uhlmann 2011: 78).

between subject and object" (Beckett 2001: 70).[5] This manifest concern continues to underpin Beckett's preoccupation with the nature of consciousness, often explored in his work through a focus on the dichotomies body/mind, experience/knowledge and subject/object. However, rather than constructing sense-experience as merely illusory, and the rational logical processes of the mind as the route to "truth," Beckett sets out to illustrate the profound confusion inherent to human experience more generally.

The foregrounding of physical experience in Beckett's work could therefore be seen as part of his strategy to undermine language and prepare the ground for a different kind of perception. It is in this sense that we can understand Beckett to be asking, as Feldman suggests, "the same questions of art as the Presocratics were asking about the world" (Feldman 2006: 7).[6] The meticulous descriptions of the body and its gestures are a means to undermine linguistic meaning and gear the reader's attention towards other qualities in the work. In so doing, Beckett not only gives "shape to the confusion" of his characters (Beckett 1999b: *xi*), but he also prompts his readers to break with the habitual appropriation of language as a means to try to make "sense" of his work. By turning the reader's attention towards the body instead, Beckett invites the reader to suspend linguistic judgment, in favour of a more dynamic and embodied involvement with the text.

III

"For you there is no other any more" (Beckett 1999a: 13)

The significance of the body in Beckett's work has not gone unnoticed. However, the extent to which Beckett's *oeuvre* invests "value in

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[5] In 1934, under the pseudonym Andrew Belis, Beckett wrote an article entitled "Recent Irish Poetry," published in *Disjecta,* 1983.

[6] Exploring the connection between memory and habit was also an important part of Beckett's effort to "disrepute language." In a widely quoted letter to his German friend Axel Kaun, Beckett makes what is often taken as a programmatic declaration, suggesting an artistic method yet to be explored: "As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole in it after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today" (Beckett 2001: 172).

embodied experience" has remained relatively unaddressed (Maude 2009: 2). While the first wave of Beckett criticism features scholars who discuss the body, mostly in terms of its representing a contrast to the mind, thereby reflecting Beckett's interest in Cartesian dualism, subsequent scholarship has sought to broaden the philosophical discussion in his work, by addressing the body in a variety of ways, for example, by looking at its participation in the production of social, cultural and philosophical meanings. Post-structural readings of the body in Beckett's work have also approached the body's significance for the production of subjectivity and identity, through a self-reflective use of language, as well as discussed the body's relationship to language itself. Yet, in nearly all these highly relevant approaches to the body in Beckett's *oeuvre*, emphasis has nevertheless remained, as Ulrika Maude points out, on discourse rather than "the body itself" (Maude 2009: 3). Clearly, Beckett scholarship has not sufficiently recognised the extent to which his focus on the body is a consistent phenomenological concern with consciousness, the ways in which the body is part of thinking, nor the extent to which Beckett problematises habitual appropriations of embodied experience and meaning.

Beckett's awareness of the problem of presentation and representation made him receptive to some of the central tenets of phenomenology that involve "consciousness, sensory perception and embodied experience," all of which receive ample attention in his work, as well as in his own critical writings, where the structure of consciousness is frequently addressed (Maude and Feldman 2009: 1). Beckett's descriptions of experience are phenomenological, because of the way in which they problematise the meaning of conventional actions (like walking,) by foregrounding the characters' individual experiences of these actions (walking does not take "you" anywhere,) as a way to displace cultural and/or social expectations (walking should take you somewhere). Moreover, Beckett's consistent focus on immobility and stasis reveals a paradox entailed in habitual "readings" of mobility as positive, since, more often than not, the characters' most important insights seem to emerge precisely out of the stasis and immobility they experience. Through destabilising the relation between subject and object—in "Heard in the Dark I" presented as a moment of crisis by means of which a character unable to move begins to perceive the world differently—and through placing strong emphasis on physical

movements, Beckett is able to produce a situation of linguistic ambiguity. Thus, not only the connection between experience and knowledge is problematised, but also the relationship between language and meaning.

IV

"Unhearing and unseeing you go your way. Day after day. The same way." (Beckett 1999a: 13)

The somatic shape presented in "Heard in the Dark I" seems to lose its sense of orientation through habitually performing the same routine everyday: "Unhearing and unseeing you go your way. Day after day. The same way. As if there were no other anymore. For you there is no other any more" (Beckett 1999a: 13). Although walking is a movement that we frequently associate with direction, transportation and action, the character in "Heard in the Dark" seems completely distanced from any such project. Recalling Nietzsche's statement that "all truly great thoughts are conceived by walking," it is perhaps surprising that no great thoughts appear to evolve out of the walking in this context. Instead, walking here is an activity that is completely devoid of thinking, and in this sense, inauthentic. The man does not seem to have a goal but "plods" on "from nought to anew" (14). Without attention or focus, he merely follows the beeline he usually takes, as if it was someone else's path; thereby revealing the danger involved in habitually pursuing the same routine every day. By analogy, as Dante realised in the dark forest, being on the path of someone else's way is to have lost one's life (Keleman 1999: 39). In this sense, following the path of someone else is inauthentic—even if that someone else is "you." The moment the man stops could therefore be seen to constitute an instance of authenticity, which, if only momentary, is still significantly more meaningful than the mindlessness entailed in going through life without paying attention to it in its particular inflections, variations and nuances.

Moreover, the snowy field in spring "strewn with red placentae," presents an anti-pastoral setting for the walk, and the contrast between the "expanse of light" of the "snowlit scene," and the narrator, who is now "lying in the dark with closed eyes" (11), serves to enhance visual imagery in a way that is reminiscent of Milton's "darkness visible." In the dark room, behind closed eyelids, the moment remembered

seemingly promises no hope, but only "[r]egions of sorrow, doleful shades," of a life spent in "utter darkness" (Milton 2003: 1, 64-73).Yet, these contrasts between darkness and light also reveal the ambiguity of the situation, as well as the confusion that this ambiguity gives rise to. As Beckett explained in an interview with Tom Driver in 1961: "If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable" (quoted in Graver 1979: 219). The organisation of elements in the story that allude to light and darkness, blindness and the deadening effect of habit, therefore, metaphorically convey the illusory nature of sensory experience. The ambiguities evoked by the tension between light and darkness in the text also parallel the tension between the authentic and the inauthentic in the character's actions.

However, as Beckett was well aware, there is no position, whether in time or space, from which we may objectively perceive or understand anything in the world. There is no "perception which is not full of memories," but the residue of former impressions still inform our perspective to the point where we see only what we expect to see, hear only what we expect hear and finally, understand only what we already know (Bergson 1988: 24).[7] The significance of memory to occlude "pure" perception, a frequent theme in Beckett's works and one that he addressed already in his essay on *Proust*, here resurfaces to demonstrate how preconceived ideas about meaning or significance linger on. These continue to inform our understanding of the world, to the point where: "Unhearing and unseeing [we] go your way. Day after day. The same way" (Beckett 1999a: 13). For Beckett, Proust's characters are victims of, or subject to, the laws of memory and habit, and ultimately suffer from these conditions: "There is no great difference, says Proust, between the memory of a dream and the memory of reality" (qtd in Beckett 2001: 33). On the strength of these insights, "the performance of memory in Beckett's work (whatever the genre) [. . .] refuses the past as either spatially or temporally static: as either museum or linear narrative: the past is rather produced in the present" (McMullan 2002: 6).

The notion that fixed meanings dull the senses is for Beckett intrinsically linked to the question of habit, since it is precisely our

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[7] In *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image,* Anthony Uhlmann suggests that Beckett was well aware of Bergson's theories of perception.

customary beliefs and traditions that keep us from fully grasping the world afresh. In *Proust* he writes. “Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to its vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit” (Beckett 2001: 19). Still, the spell of habit can be broken by sudden rupture, which “opens a window on the real” (Beckett 2001: 28). The rupture can come in the shape of an “involuntary memory,” as in Proust’s famous Madeleine cake episode, or it can come in the shape of a moment of crisis. Thus, the spell of habit that guides perception momentarily is broken to reveal the world as a “non-logical statement of phenomena, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into the chain of cause and effect” (Beckett 2001: 86). In “Heard in the Dark I,” the moment of crisis occurs with the “unerring feet fast,” creating an unprecedented rupture in the habitual routine of walking.

V

“You look behind you as you could not then” (Beckett 1999a: 15)

The stopping and looking back is the single event focalised in the story, “Heard in the Dark I,” and the meaning of this moment seems to hinge on the way in which the shape in the snow takes on symbolic meaning. Up until the moment he stops, the character has been oblivious to the world around him. However, in the temporal “now” of the story, the narrator imagines the character stopping to look back on the trail that materialises before his mind’s eye, a “great swerve,” whose contour is drawn by the feet in the white snow (Beckett 1999a: 16). In the dark room, with eyes closed, the moment remembered promises no hope to a life now spent in “utter darkness.” The image of the character standing in the middle of the field can therefore be seen as an image of despair.

While the moment of crisis entailed in the memory is abysmal, indeed it is described as an instance of “speechless misgiving” (15), it is also an image of poetic force, through which the past suddenly becomes visible. In the dark “with closed eyes,” the narrator revisits a specific moment but perceives it, as it were, differently: “The dark cope of sky. The dazzling land. You at a standstill in the midst [. . .]. You look behind you as you could not then and see their trail. A great swerve” (15). The poignant climax in the story “now” appears as a shape on the ground, and the moment of perceiving this shape as meaningful constitutes a moment of insight for the character, illustrating the dialectical nature of having an

experience, and the act of thinking about that experience. Although it could also be argued that this moment, while epiphanic in nature, only leads to silence—just as for Beckett writing itself "leads to silence" (Beckett qtd in Juliet 2009: 16).

The situation that unfolds in the story epitomises Søren Kierkegaard's observation that life must be understood backwards (Kierkegaard 1996: 161). However, it also illustrates Kierkegaard's own refutation of this premise, namely that adopting a position from which life can be "properly understood" backwards is, in effect, impossible. In remembering, the narrator actually changes the moment, or rather invents something entirely different. The shape in the snow, which previously was not visible to the character—because of the way in which his movements and posture restricted the view of the world to the "momentary ground beneath the feet" (Beckett 1999a: 12)—is actually not remembered at all, but imaginatively recreated.

The process of reshaping experience, through the creative act of imagination, therefore also reveals the way in which experience fails to provide a foundation for knowledge. Only with hindsight does the character understand the significance of the moment of stopping. Only in the "tranquil recollection" of this moment of crisis does it begin to make any kind of sense to the character/narrator, or perhaps, reader. In the temporal past of the story, the limitations imposed on the character by the body seemingly occlude the possibility to see the "real" shape produced by the trail of feet in the snow: "For you advance if not with closed eyes [. . .] at least with them fixed on the momentary ground before your feet. That is all of nature you have seen. Since you finally bowed your head" (12–13). Only in remembering the walk does the narrator actually arrive to "see" the trail in the snow. Temporalities therefore overlap in the narrator's reminiscence of the past: the act of remembering, like the narrative itself, projects forward in time. Yet the moment remembered does not completely abandon its temporal status of past. Although the act of remembering projects forwards, the situation remembered is understood "backwards." The act of remembering, therefore, like the act of reading, is presented as an "ideal" position in which the temporal dimensions of life can coincide. In this way, the proliferation of narrative perspectives in the story illustrates the similarities between reconstructing a memory and telling a story.

While the narrator and the character's visual perspectives seemingly coalesce, the second person narrative also presents a proliferation of "consciousnesses" in the story. Indeed, as the proliferation of voices reveals, the person telling the story may not be identical with the person listening, and the second person narrative also triggers the narrator's memory to overlap with the reader's creative act of imagining the situation that unfolds.[8] On the one hand, there is the narrator, remembering himself in the field. But there is also "you," the reader, or possibly another consciousness, or even the narrator speaking to someone else, although it could also suggests that the narrator and the character are in fact the same. The narrator and "you," the reader, nevertheless seem to occupy similar, or near identical, focalising perspectives, and, as a result, "you" too end up envisioning the event to the point where fiction and reality, as well as past, present and future, seem to blend.

VI
"Almost as if all at once the heart too heavy" (Beckett 1999a: 16)

How then should we understand the image of a character walking through a field and stopping mid-ways, unable to continue, while at the same time a narrative voice continues to relate the story of this situation, seemingly unable to stop talking? How should we understand the relentless voice that cannot be silenced, but keeps on telling its story in the "[s]ame flat tone at all times. For its affirmations. For its negations. For its interrogations. For its imperations. Same flat tone" (Beckett 1980: 20). The story, as it originally appears in *Company,* is part of a longer narrative, which seemingly rejects a chronological ordering, and, as such, should perhaps be seen to present an image that needs to be read in conjunction with other images of childhood that appear in the context of this longer narrative. John Pilling, in his review of the book, suggests

[8] Beckett's "life lifelong interest in sound and hearing" is implicit in his second-person narratives, of which "Heard in the Dark I" is but one example (Maude 2009: 183). Other examples include: "Heard in the Dark II"; *Embers* (1957); *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958); *Eh Joe* (1966); *Footfalls* (1975) and *Ghost Trio* (1975), all of which highlight the significance of sound through abstract and detached voices relating the characters stories.

that the "scenes from the past,"[9] which make up *Company,* present a web of implicit correlations that are operating in the text: "The upturned face of the little boy, directed first at the distant sky and then at the unloving face of his mother prefigures the upturned face of his father at the Forty-Foot Hole, the 'loved trusted face' that the boy is looking down to for succour" (Pilling 2014: 1).

Given that the story is a textual representation of childhood memories, perhaps the character in the story cannot be fully understood without the other stories that contribute to the larger canvas. But then again, does it really matter who the character or narrator is? The story that unfolds in the narrative of the character walking across the field suggests an image of both general and particular purport: he is "you," "you" are him, "I" am "you," "you" are "me." The final moment arrived at, when the character stops to see the great swerve his feet have made in the snow: "Withershins. Almost as if all at once the heart too heavy. In the end too heavy," is an image that we all may recognize, as human beings. We may all have experienced such particular moments of "immobility" in our lives, and these instances, as we read, may be brought to bear on the story, as our memories inflect towards the narrator's memory and momentarily coalesce. Reading the story therefore entails a decentring of our individuality as the second person narrative forces us to participate in the experience that unfolds. Importantly, through a narrative that invites the reader to share in the experience of another, Beckett's story possibly holds the promise of empathy.

However, by heightening the reader's attention to the body, Beckett also returns us to the particularity of presentation. In this sense, Beckett's texts, whether his prose or dramas, are wake-up calls to perception, because they enable us to see the world afresh. In the case of "Heard in the Dark I," not only is reading the movements described (walking, stopping, looking back,) kinaesthetically meaningful, but the description also brings about a phenomenological shift of attitude, as the second person narrative triggers the fictive character's memory to overlap with the reader's creative act of imagining the event of stopping in the field. Importantly, the shift of attitude that the story prompts is revelatory of how: (A) seeing does not happen with the eyes. (The narrator lies in the

[9] "As Beckett calls them in his manuscript notebook" (Pilling 2014: 1).

dark with closed eyes and now sees the scene, as he could not then); (B) Walking does not necessarily take you anywhere: "Unhearing and unseeing you go your way. Day after day. The same way." (Indeed, Beckett's characters famously never get anywhere, but repeat the same habitual actions over and over again.); and finally (C), perception does not necessarily entail understanding.

The story therefore points to the significance of the body for the process of reshaping experience and seeing the world differently. The shape in the snow, rather than illustrating the character's life, constitutes a pertinent image of the mobilisation of memory, but it also shows how perception can change to allow for "new" insights, despite the deadening effect of habit. Albeit, the moment we realise that something has changed is of course not the moment change took place—it is only the moment when we become *aware* of change. In fact, change has already happened, and the moment, as such, is already gone, as Kierkegaard's reflection on temporal life illustrates. Still, the story offers its readers an opportunity to engage in the creative act of imagining self-movement, and in so doing, it testifies to the body's capacity to transform us.

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