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***How it is Again***  
***Regression as Renewal, Unpleasure as Compensation***

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Abstract:

This essay examines *How It Is* in the context of Beckett's personal creative crisis of the late fifties from which it arose, and also that of his psychoanalysis with Bion, 20 years earlier. Looking at *How It Is* as a work that tends to collapse the opposition between regression and renewal, the essay also examines the role of unpleasure in the text, as a complication of the oft noted sadism. Finally, the work's parodic pedagogic episodes of "training" are compared to similar motifs in *Murphy* and *Molloy*, in light of Laplanche's theory of seduction.

keywords: regression, symptom, seduction, psychoanalysis,

As has been known for many years, *Comment c'est*—the last long prose piece Beckett was ever to write—arose from a period of profound artistic crisis for him, in which he felt that his creative impetus had lost its proper intensity and necessity. Although he was only to settle on his French title well after finishing his text, critics have always and rightly stressed the punning nature of the French, and viewed *Comment c'est* as a work which for Beckett meant a new beginning. But it is crucial also to note an obvious irony, to wit, that this new beginning was at the same time just the opposite: Beckett himself clearly conceived of it as a kind of *return* to an earlier relationship to his work, as a refusal to begin again. Or better, one might view the book as a renewal which was in some ways identical to a regression, so that the "beginning" and "newness" implied by "commencer" is vitiated by the sense of interminable insistence and repetition conveyed by the actual title "Comment c'est"—"how it is." The French pun compresses the opposition between newness on the one hand, and an implacable eternal "present condition" on the other, and indeed, this opposition is one of the motors driving the text itself, in the repetitive cycles it narrates. The very structure of the text, then, and the acts of violence it recounts, mirror the way Beckett understood the necessary conditions of its coming into being, conditions which relied on another return, as well as an act of self-directed violence. Beckett makes this clear in several important letters of the winter of '58-'59, when he was beginning the earliest versions of *Comment c'est* while also, not incidentally, finding himself immersed in the earlier work of the period he prized as exemplary, occupied as he was with translating *L'innomable* and the *Textes pour rien*. In a letter of November 23, 1958—about three weeks before he begins "Pim," the earliest fragment of *Comment c'est*—Beckett writes to Barney Rosset:

The only chance for me now as a writer is to go into retreat and put a stop to all this fucking élan acquis and get back down to the bottom of all the hills again, grimmer hills that [*for* than] in 45 of cherished memory and far less than then to climb with, i. e. nice proportions. It's not going to be easy, but it's definitely the only last gasp worth trying to pant as far as I'm concerned. So if all goes well no new work for a long time now, if ever. (*Letters* 3, 181)

Six days later, he expresses very similar sentiments to Barbara Bray:

I am very touched by what you say of the U. [*The Unnamable*] I wish I could think it is important as you say, but of course I can't. I am in acute crisis about my work (on the lines familiar to you by now) and have decided that I not merely can't but won't go on as I have been going more or less ever since the *Textes* pour rien and must either get back to nothing again and the bottom of all the hills again like before Molloy or else call it a day. (*Letters* 3, 183-4)

Yet of course he didn't call it a day, and by February 3, 1959, he was able to write his old friend Con Leventhal:

I have given up all thought of theatre and radio and am struggling to struggle on from where the *Unnamable* left me off, that is with the next next to nothing. A few lines a day is an achievement. Brilliant bitter days. (*Letters* 3, 194)

Note the implication of the above statements: the problem is not that Beckett can't go on, but that he *can*, and all too easily. What he rails against most vociferously is in fact momentum: "this fucking élan acquis." To rid oneself of it—to bring oneself to a halt—seems at once an act of the will and an ethical decision: "I . . . have decided that I not merely can't go on but won't go on as I have been going more or less ever since the *Textes* pour rien..." Nothing is easier than to go on, and this ease must be met with a refusal, in order either to stop writing entirely, or to return to the form of authenticity embodied by *The Unnamable* and the *Texts*. For very compelling reasons, then, *How It Is* asks to be read in the context of the trilogy and the *Texts* as much if not more than a more contemporaneous one, which might include *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, or even *Endgame* (which, let it be noted, is implicitly disavowed by Beckett's scorn for all his work since the *Textes*). In his powerful reading of *How It Is*, for example, H. Porter Abbott argues persuasively that it "retroactively de-terminate[s]" the *Texts*, opening that work out into an unfinishedness much as the *Texts* can be seen to do to *The Unnamable* (97): if the *Texts* can be considered in some way as a coda to and extension of *The Unnamable*, *How It Is* functions similarly with regard to the *Texts*. And of course, like both those works, *How It Is* obsessively worries the question of the origin and source of the utterances it presents, as the speaker within it presents itself as citing, repeating, or over-hearing in the complex dances of circular disavowals (as the disavowing voice must be disavowed) that all readers of Beckett's prose know so well. As the book's narrator obsessively reminds us, from the very first block of text, "I quote" and "I say it as I hear it." Whoever is telling us this story might never have been in the mud before, with, and after Pim, but simply be citing the story of someone who has. Even worse, as many critics have noted, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell if the oft repeated "I

quote” and “I say it as I hear it” belong to the narrating speech or the narrated speech, opening the possibility of the narration of another narration, in the endlessly recursive structure of receding narrative instances which is Beckett’s signature.

However, unlike all of the novels of the trilogy and the *Texts* which it in so many ways resembles, *How It Is* does not end with brilliant rhetorical, grammatical, or narratological aporetic constructions concerning the foundational origin or source of the narrating voice. Rather, it flips the paradigm on its head. As the novel reaches its conclusion, we read a comparatively definitive statement: “there was something yes but nothing of all that no all balls from start to finish yes this voice quaqu yes all balls yes only one voice here yes mine yes when the panting stops yes” (144-5). It could be argued that this trend is undone by the novel’s final passage: “good good end at last of part three and last that’s how it was end of quotation after Pim how it is” (147), but still, the closing gesture’s assertion of the reality of *solitude* along with the erasure of the fictive interpersonal exchanges it had previously proposed, means that the Beckett text *How It Is* most closely resembles is one with which it is not frequently paired: *Company*, written about 20 years later, and which at its end erases “The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were. Alone” (63).<sup>1</sup> Note, however, that if both texts assert a form of solitude, it is with none of the guarantees or solaces that solitude is meant to offer. In *Company* this is particularly patent. Here, even solitude does not permit consciousness to feel other than dictated or haunted, or allow the “unthinkable last person,” the I, to be given a position. *How It Is*, on the contrary, appears to offer a form of appropriation rare in Beckett—the first person possessive pronoun “mine,” in contrast to the “me” so resoundingly rejected by Malone, for example. However, in some ways, the opposition between appropriation and disappropriation doesn’t matter—what does is the moment when we feel everything that had been called outside and everything else that had been designated as within queasily alternate places, as recounter and recounted, narrated content and narrative act, swivel as if on a hinge: that is to say, what matters is the heavy lifting and leverage accomplished by shifters and deictics.

There are many important differences which should not be ignored, but in terms of what concerns me here, it’s fair to suggest that on a broad level the trilogy and the *Texts* on the one hand and *How It Is* and *Company* on the other are quite similar, but whereas the trilogy works from the inside out, as it were, the latter two works move from the outside in. That is, in the first group we are given an “I” becoming a “not I,” in the latter a “not I” becoming an “I.” This is the difference, perhaps, between a fable that says “I am not myself” and one that says “The other is me.” In Beckett’s broadest dialectic these two forms of attack perhaps resolve into very similar questions, but in terms of how they position the reader towards the narrative they are significantly different. One way to think of this is that in the former group we see allegorized the process of recognizing that one is a stranger to

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<sup>1</sup> The above notwithstanding, it should be noted that *How It Is* is discussed in relation to *Company* in illuminating articles by Jonathan Boulter as well as Bersani and Dutoit.

oneself, whereas in the second—and especially in *How It Is*—we see the primacy of the other in subject formation. And this also means one’s “own” primacy in the formation of the subjectivity of others. *How It Is*, I would like to suggest, is above all a story of reciprocity, as Jonathan Boulter has very aptly suggested,<sup>2</sup> in which another’s experience of oneself is as important as one’s own experience of another.

This is important, as it moves beyond the framework of monadological subjectivity which Beckett’s work can imply, particularly works like the trilogy, which begin with the positing of a subjective immanence, which subsequently, by way of Beckett’s perverse forms of phenomenological reduction, finds itself not confirmed in its essence but blasted beside itself in an interminable ecstasy. But in *How It Is*, the subject is not only an impossible object for itself, always becoming its own other, but it is also an other for others. Here, for example, a first-person voice posits itself as an imposer of names and an extorter of speech, and not only as the victim of these processes, as in the trilogy. This is the heart of the second part of *How It Is*, the part which, to the extent we can believe the text’s own interpretation of its chronology, is “with Pim.”

This consists above all of what the text calls “training” in the form of a series of “lessons.”<sup>3</sup> In these, the narrator, in his role of tormentor, has to teach Pim a series of appropriate responses to a series of painful stimuli, applied with finger-nails and both ends of a can opener. But no verbal explanation is given to Pim—as the book morbidly stresses, he has to figure it out for himself. Once Pim has learned the appropriate responses, then he must learn his name, by having it carved into his flesh. The book itself is happy to sum up the stimuli and responses as follows:

table of basic stimuli one sing nails in armpit two speak blade in arse three stop thump on skull four louder pestle on kidney

five softer index in anus six bravo clap athwart arse seven lousy same as three eight encore same as one or two as may be (69)

Before reaching this summation, however, the narrator expends some energy on imagining the process by which Pim learns his lessons, the import of the stimuli being in no way obvious. After recounting the first two applications of the nails to the armpits, which elicit no more than cries of pain, we have the following speculations from the narrator on how the learning process must work from the student’s perspective:

but this man is no fool he must say to himself I would if I were he what does he require of me or better still what is required of me that I am tormented thus and the answer sparsim little by little vast tracts of time

not that I should cry that is evident since when I do I am punished instanter

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<sup>2</sup> See Boulter, especially pp. 194-8.

<sup>3</sup> See Anthony Cordingley for a fascinating reading of the historical pedagogical context behind these sessions.

sadism pure and simple no since I may not cry

something perhaps beyond my powers assuredly not this creature is no fool one senses that

what is not beyond my powers known not to be beyond them song it is required therefore that I sing (63)

There is quite a lot at stake in this little parable. First, note that the stimulus, in probably every case, is pain. The behavior-inducing sequence is pain and then relief from pain (with two possible exceptions). Second, as presented by the narrator, the entire learning process can only occur given the possibility of specular projection onto the other by each member of the couple. It is because the tormentor can put himself in the place of the tormented that he can have confidence that his method will work. And when he embarks on this speculative adventure, it is in order to affirm that the tormented would in turn put *himself* in the place of the tormentor, in order to logically deduce what kind of thing might be demanded of him. That is, no matter how much the scene parodies the kind of conditioned-response experiments that might be done on animals, as conceived of here it relies entirely on specifically human intersubjectivity. In fact, the hermeneutic scene here allegorizes in some ways what psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche calls the “fundamental anthropological situation”: that of the helpless infant, who must interpret the desire of the primary caretaker as expressed through the idiom of language as well as the physical gestures of care. For Laplanche, what makes this relationship—the basis of his general theory of seduction—so fraught, is that the primary care given by the adult is inhabited by an unconscious sexual signification, which turns these gestures into “enigmatic messages” which produce a remainder the infant cannot translate or accommodate. For Laplanche, the gradual attempts at translation—for the infant, most certainly accomplished over “vast tracts of time”—is what the famous unconscious complexes are made of:

Far from being primordial elements of the Id, the Oedipus complex and castration are tools for creating order. . . . Castration allows the translation of anxieties and enigmatic messages into a form that can be mastered (1999, 141-2, my translation).

Now, Beckett’s text can only be read as a very broad allegory of the Laplanchean problematic, but note two salient resemblances: first, that the story of Pim is very much the story of the entrance into the symbolic, as is emphasized by his having to learn and to recognize his name, and second, that the “training” in *How It Is* creates a body at once disciplinary, semiotized, and sexualized. An important point for Laplanche is that the sexualized messages inhabiting primary care are powerfully transmitted through the relationship to the body’s erogenous zones—notably the mother’s own breast when she nurses—but beyond this, the relationship of any adult to the infant’s sexual organs, which will most certainly not be touched or cared for in the same way as other parts of the body. There are echoes of both of these elements in *How It Is*. Just as the tormented Pim asks “what does he require of me or better still what is required of me,” Laplanche’s infant asks of the mother’s breast, “what does it want of me, beyond nursing me, and indeed, why does it want to nurse me at all?” (1987, 125, my

translation). If *How It Is* has no breast, it most certainly does foreground the anus in its allegory of the administered, trained body, even scandalously suggesting that the index in the anus and the clap athwart the arse might in fact be stimuli of pleasure.

Of course, one of the crucial aspects of *How It Is* is that the narrator and Pim are specular doubles—two old men—who, as we’ve just seen, have a projective reciprocity built into their relationship. Moreover, integral to the structure of *How It Is* is the reversibility of the positions of tormentor and tormented, and the fact that as the narrator was to Pim, so Bom will be to him. It would therefore be hasty to simply read this scene as a parable for the wildly unequal infant-adult exchange of the “fundamental anthropological situation.” But it would be equally hasty not to. One reason for this is the entire matter of regression that we have already discussed—the infantile situation of the two old men seems to stage the regression that Beckett was seeking out as he embarked on the writing of *Comment c’est*. In parallel to this, let us note that this scene with its parodic, exaggerated, and violent account of conditioned-response and semiotic coding rewrites at least two other scenes from Beckett’s earlier work, both of which involve the mother-child relationship.

The first is from *Murphy*, in which the description of Murphy’s ploy for swindling a waitress out of an extra 83 percent of a cup of tea outs Beckett’s familiarity with experimental psychology in the ostentatiously allusive style of the early prose. Murphy conceives of his plan as a clinical experiment, in which “preparatory signal” and “stimulus proper” are carefully managed in his attempt to produce the desired result (80-81). But as Jean-Michel Rabaté aptly observes, Murphy’s culminating stratagem of referring to milk as “cowjuice” to play on the waitress’ maternal identifications shifts the whole paradigm in a crucial manner: it is the “linking of the domain of the unconscious to a conditioned-response staging that allows Murphy one of his rare symbolic victories in the “big world” (142, my translation). Thus, if much of Beckett’s knowledge of psychology comes from Woodworth’s *Contemporary Schools of Psychology*, as Matthew Feldman has argued, already in the thirties Beckett collided experimental psychology with psychoanalytic modes of enquiry.<sup>4</sup> This articulation of conditioned response mechanisms, semiotic training, unconscious structures, and maternal identification leads to the other major scene that *How It Is* rewrites: Molloy’s system for communicating with his deaf, blind, senile mother:

She jabbered away with a rattle of dentures and most of the time didn’t realize what she was saying. Anyone but myself would have been lost in this clattering gabble, which can only have stopped during her brief instants of unconsciousness. In any case I didn’t come to listen to her. I got into communication with her by knocking on her skull. One knock meant yes, two no, three I don’t know, four money, five goodbye. I was hard put to ram this code into her ruined and frantic understanding, but I did it, in the end. That she should confuse yes, no, I don’t know and goodbye, was all the same to me, I confused them myself. But that she should associate the four knocks with anything but money was something to be avoided at all

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<sup>4</sup>See Feldman, especially pp. 102-7.

costs. During the period of training therefore, at the same time as I administered the four knocks on her skull, I stuck a bank-note under her nose or in her mouth. (17-18).

This passage from *Molloy* seems to stand between *Murphy* and *How It Is*, and not only chronologically. In *Murphy*, the form of the response occurs without conscious intervention or deliberate participation, whether the model is that of unconscious identification or associational automatism. In *Molloy*, however, note the crucial word “training,” the word which also underpins the entire scene from *How It Is*. Murphy (the character) manipulates associations and processes already operating in Vera, whereas in *Molloy* and *How It Is* it is a matter of *creating* new forms of association. Beyond that, however, it is also a matter of assigning meaning to pain. The invocation of maternal care in both *Murphy* and *Molloy*, even if inverted in the latter, lends its overtones to the “with Pim” section in *How It Is*, and reinforces that text’s regressive feel. Yet *How It Is* does something else too, by both de-hierarchizing and eternalizing the scene of “training,” and refusing to stage it as a fundamentally asymmetrical relationship as in that of parent to child, or child to aged parent. In *How It Is*, everyone trains and is trained in turn, in an ever revolving mechanism which suggests not so much a primal initiation into the symbolic but a continually self-reinforcing performative ritual that serves the purpose of binding pain to semiosis. With its apparently triangular movement and interchangeability of roles one of the Beckett works *How It Is* most closely resembles is *Quad*, but within its descriptions of geometrical patterns and positions, the substitutability of the places of tormentor and tormented is something the text stresses very powerfully, as here:

two there were two of us his hand on my arse someone had come Bom Bem one syllable m at the end all that matters Bem had come to cleave to me see later Pim and me I had come to cleave to Pim the same thing except that me Pim Bem me Bem left me south

Bem come to cleave to me where I lay abandoned to give me a name his name to give me a life make me talk of a life said to have been mine above in the light before I fell all the already said part two with Pim another part two before part one except that me Pim Bem me Bem left me south I hear it murmur it in the mud (109)

“Another part two before part one”: that is, another part having the structure of “with,” rather than before or after. In terms of its structures, *How It Is* recognizes in many places a tension between triangles and squares, as it were, between three and four. As the passage above points out, in the life in the mud which the book recounts, there are strictly speaking 4 moments or positions: that when a tormentor crawls towards its victim (before Pim), that of the tormenting (with Pim), that when the tormentor is abandoned by its victim (after Pim), and that when the former tormentor now takes the place of victim for another tormentor (as the narrator does for Bom). What this means is that *How It Is*, with its tripartite structure, leaves out one of the phases—what the passage above calls “another part two.” Not surprisingly, this omission worries the narrator a little later on:



fleeting impression I quote that in trying to present in three parts or episodes an affair which all things considered involves four one is in danger of being incomplete (130)

Very shortly thereafter, however, we are told that the voice is “loath for the episode couple even in its twofold aspect to figure twice in the same communication” (131), and the following explanation is given:

loathing most understandable if it be kindly considered that the two solitudes that of the journey and that of the abandon differ appreciably and consequently merit separate treatment whereas the two couples that in which I figure in the north as tormentor and that in which I figure in the south as victim compose the same spectacle exactly (131)

This somewhat counter-intuitive passage is also typically Beckettian—the quality of the two different forms of solitude is seen as a significant distinction, whereas the question of who happens to be the torturer and who the victim at any particular moment is a fundamentally uninteresting detail. As the text puts it, “what the fuck I quote does it matter who suffers” (131). It would be wrong to accuse Beckett of political irresponsibility or a callous indifference to a distinction which is of course crucial to those who get tortured. On the contrary, it doesn’t matter because “it’s someone each in his turn”; because in the mud everyone takes turns being both. And despite the “I quote” of the passage above, in *How It Is* the primal fact is not the sourceless continuance of discourse that we see in the trilogy and the *Texts*, but the eternal transsubjective suffering of the body: “what the fuck I quote does it matter who suffers” replaces the *Texts*’ “What matter who’s speaking, someone said what matter who’s speaking” (85). Or in French, we move from “Qu’importe qui parle, quelqu’un a dit qu’importe qui parle” (129) to “qu’est-ce que ça peut bien foutre je cite qui souffre” (204).

The suffering, of course, is *also* the suffering of speech, of being forced to speak or even to sing, of being dislodged from either of the two forms of solitude. And the infliction of pain on others is not a compensation for this suffering, but is itself a form of duty, subject to law. But this physical suffering works in two different ways in *How It Is*. So far, we have been looking at the body as a vector of transmission of the demand of the other, and pain in its classical neurological or evolutionary guise as a conveyor of signals. The body’s capacity to suffer is used as a tool to provoke responses. But there’s another form of training that looks at the body not as a conveyor of information to a subjectivity attached to it, but rather as a site of inscription and element of identification for the subject itself, who in the allegory of *How It Is* finds its name literally written into its own body. For part of the “training” in *How It Is* consists of the tortured party coming to accept as its own the name that the torturer carves into its flesh, a name which is also the torturer’s own: “when this has sunk in I let him know that I too Pim my name Pim” (60), and of course later the narrator projects “part three and last the day comes I come to the day Bom comes YOU BOM me Bom ME BOM you Bom we Bom” (76). The transmission of the torturer’s name onto the victim evokes a patriarchal, patrilineal

form of symbolic identificatory violence, but beyond this, I want to focus on a variant of this corporeal writing which occurs earlier, the first time the narrator imagines the arrival of Bom:

the one I'm waiting for oh not that I believe in him I say it as I hear it he can give me another  
it will be my first Bom he can call me Bom for more commodity that would appeal to me m at  
the end and one syllable the rest indifferent

BOM scored by finger-nail athwart the arse the vowel in the hole I would say in a scene from  
my life he would oblige me to have had a life. . . (60)

Beckett's obscene joke implies not only that the body can be a surface for writing, but that it is *already* such a surface in its disposition of organs and liminal spaces, spaces which record and make possible investments that are excessive and unmasterable, yet subsequently taken up in other forms of corporeal writing. In this particular allegory, if the name is not "natural" but imposed it is nevertheless internalized into the body, internalized even by what is already internal to the body. In these passages, the body less *conveys* meaning than *becomes* the site of contested and over-determined meanings, in its very pleasures and pains, which are meanings themselves. In short, we move from a post-Cartesian and neo-Darwinian parody of the instrumental body to a psychoanalytic one of the hysterical body, or the body as locus of the symptom.

Despite the uncertainty that still remains regarding the extent of Beckett's knowledge of psychoanalysis, the "archival turn" has reinforced what his work had already indicated: that Beckett's interest in post-Freudian thought was centered above all on the etiology and signifying economies of the symptom, both obsessional and hysteric. The published texts show a subtlety of understanding of these only rarely paralleled in 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. And of course, it was above all hysterical symptoms which brought Beckett to his analysis with Bion in the first place. If the published letters are any indication, Beckett's learning to reconceptualize his symptoms was at the center of the analysis. One particularly telling passage comes in a February, 1935 letter to Tom McGreevy:

I go on with Bion. . . histoire d'élan acquis. I see no reason why it should ever come  
to an end. The old heart pounces now & then, as though to console me for the intolerable  
symptoms of an improvement. (*Letters I*, 253)

Beckett's humor here comes from his understanding of resistance, of "negative therapeutic reactions," of unconscious attachment to the causes of suffering. One thinks of Freud's discussion of masochism, in which he explains that for certain patients the most intractable of symptoms will suddenly disappear if the analysand is visited by an actual calamity: for the neurosis, all that matters is that there be suffering. Of course, beyond this, the phrase "élan acquis" calls to mind the letter with which we started, from 1958, in which the élan acquis is precisely what Beckett wants to be rid of in his hope to return to hills even grimmer than those of 1945. Is the repetition of the phrase a coincidence? At any rate, psychoanalysis was at least partially on Beckett's mind as he composed *Comment c'est*—in the

summer of 1959, in the very midst of it, we know he was reading Ernest Jones' biography of Freud, which Barbara Bray had given him (*Letters* 3, 237). And of all Beckett's texts, *How It Is* is perhaps the most like a hysterical body itself, as many of its readers have attested, resisting the usual categories of the aesthetic, or the economies of punishment and reward we associate with aesthetic consumption. Very early on, Blanchot considered it a work that "doesn't surpass but rather discredits all praise, and it would be paradoxical to read it with admiration" (481, my translation). Similarly, on February 2, 1961, Beckett writes in response to Barbara Bray's review of *Comment c'est* "You have 'understood' the book as no one so far. You of course greatly overrate it and me, but we won't go into that again. What you say of its being not about something, but something, is exactly what I wrote of *Finnegans* in the *Exagmination*" (*Letters* 3, 397). About two years later, immersed in translating *Comment c'est*, he writes to Bray again, "Improved *C. C.* a bit I think and caught up on some bad slips, but it remains unreadable which is a great beauty" (*Letters* 3, 525). So *Comment c'est* is then an unreadable thing about nothing—a production and embodiment more than a representation, and a representation mostly of the necessity that there be suffering, no matter who suffers. And the agreement of Bray and Beckett that it "is" the thing as much as it is "about" it implies that the cyclical exchange of torment it recounts reaches out to envelop the reader too. Beckett wrote *Comment c'est* when his international reputation was exploding after years of obscurity; when honors and awards were increasingly raining down upon him; when his financial situation was allowing him to move to a larger and better situated apartment; when his relationship with Barbara Bray was solidifying and growing in intimacy and importance. *How It Is* might be viewed as the consolation for the intolerable symptoms of an improvement. Yet, by way of its very structural rigidities, the book refuses to view the symptom itself as a simple contingent epiphenomenon of a private history. *How It Is* is valuable and perhaps intolerable for this indecision.

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