

Joycean Narrative in Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*: Who Veils the Name of the 'dear' Person?

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*LEAVE, I was going to say leave all that.
What matter who's speaking, someone said
what matter who's speaking.*

(Texts for Nothing 3)

Introduction

In Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*, just two figures wearing long black coats and with long white hair, who are "as alike as possible", appear in the dim light surrounded by darkness on stage. A strange communication takes place between them; one, called R (Reader), reads from a book while the other, called L (Listener), knocks on the table in response. The audience of the play is not allowed to grasp the whole story. The stage directions read: "Book on the table before [R] open at last pages". The audience observes R's reading only the last few pages of the book between an opening line, "Little is left to tell", and the closing one, "Nothing is left to tell".

The narrative to be read on the stage tells us that the protagonist (indicated as 'he') regrets his move from where he had lived with someone who had a 'dear' face and suffers from sleepless nights. Then, a man appears to read a book to the protagonist. Yet the name of the person who sent the man to him is concealed, without showing any reason being given in the sentence, "One night as he sat trembling head in hands from head to foot a man appeared to him and said, I have been sent by—*and here he named the dear name*—to comfort you" (447, my emphasis). Who interrupts the narration to conceal the name? At a glance, it seems natural to attribute the interruption to the narrator. This question, however, is not so easily answered as it appears; there are several possible answers. In fact, it is impossible to determine who the intervener is. That is because the viewpoint of the narrative fluctuates in the process of the narration. It moves freely between the objectivity of the narrator and the subjectivity of the characters, a movement which inevitably spoils the narrator's omniscience and reliability.

Hugh Kenner finds the same kind of fluctuation of viewpoint in James Joyce's narratives, and calls it the 'Uncle Charles Principle'. Kenner defends it by saying, "*the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's*" (original emphasis, 1978, 18). It is named after the following passage in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

Every morning, therefore, Uncle Charles repaired

to his outhouse but not before he had greased and brushed scrupulously his back hair and brushed and put on his tall hat. (62)

Kenner says that the word 'repair' wears invisible quotation marks, and that "it would be Uncle Charles's own word should he chance to say what he was doing. Uncle Charles has notions of semantic elegance [...]. If Uncle Charles spoke at all of his excursions to what he calls the outhouse, he would speak of 'repairing' there" (1978, 17). That is: "The Uncle Charles Principle entails writing about someone much as that someone would choose to be written about. So it requires a knowledge of the character at which no one could arrive by 'observation,' and yet its application to the character seems as external as costume, since it does not entail recording spoken words" (Kenner 1978, 21).

Beckett seems to have applied this principle to the narrative in *Ohio Impromptu*, as we shall see. Although the covert narrator in *Ohio Impromptu* sometimes becomes overt by asserting himself/herself with such expressions as "Little is left to tell", his/her viewpoint thus unobtrusively intermingles with the protagonist's until his/her objectivity disintegrates into the subjectivity of his/her own narration.

The play is often related to Beckett's personal memory of Joyce, as James Knowlson, in his biography of Beckett, identifies the Isle of Swan with the Allée des Cygnes in Paris, where Beckett and Joyce used to walk together. The play could be regarded as an attempt by the elderly Beckett to evoke Joyce's ghost in order to grow "to be as one" with it. This, however, can be proved not only by the biographical episodes but also through the analysis of the narrative in *Ohio Impromptu* because the narrative itself is indeed Joycean. Beckett imitated Joyce or even invented a pseudo-Joycean narrative style in order to recall Joyce or to fabricate his 'shade'.

This paper will present an analysis of the narrative discourses in *Ohio Impromptu* to explore Beckett's strategy of adapting Joyce's style for the play and of falsifying it in an elaborate, magical way.

1. The Shift of Viewpoint in Joycean Narrative

Ohio Impromptu consists of various types of discourse, each of which operates at different levels. The first line to be read on stage in *Ohio Impromptu*, "Little is left to tell" is the self-assertion by the narrator-author of the narrative, which we shall call 'meta-narration' to distinguish from the narration. A. A. Mendilow defines the function of the narrator's self-asserting in novels as follows:

By stepping out from behind the imaginary frame of the novel to address the reader in person, they recall him from the 'Relative Now' of the characters to his own 'Absolute Now'. (112)

Given the premise that *Ohio Impromptu* is a play to be performed in theatre, we should assume another level of time outside the narrative, which we shall call the 'Real Now' of R and L on stage. The first line strongly impresses on the audience the existence of the overt narrator and 'Absolute Now'. After the repetition of the same line in response to L's request by knocking, the overt narrator effaces himself/herself. His/her narration begins as follows:

<1>

[1] In a last attempt to obtain relief he moved from where they had been so long together to a single room on the far bank. [2] From its single window he could see the downstream extremity of the Isle of Swans.

(Pause.)¹ (445)

Since even this paragraph is supposed to be located nearly at the end of the narrative, we cannot know who 'he' is and what happened to him except the fact he moved over the Isle of Swans. Although the lack of the preceding parts of the story may make readers/audience feel uneasy, both sentences narrated by the third person and in the past tense seem to be objective descriptions of the protagonist from the omniscient viewpoint of the covert narrator. In the next paragraph, the style of the narrative begins to change.

<2>

[1] Relief he had hoped would flow from unfamiliarity. [2] Unfamiliar room. [3] Unfamiliar scene. [4] Out to where nothing ever shared. [5] Back to where nothing ever shared. [6] From this he had once half hoped some measure of relief might flow.

(Pause.) (445)

As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the Uncle Charles Principle applies to sentence [1]; it is not the narrator but 'he' who hopes that the relief would 'flow from unfamiliarity'. In other words, the first sentence is the subjective thought of the protagonist, although it is narrated by the third person and the past tense without being tagged. Such a style of discourse is also called 'indirect free thought'.

Seymour Chatman categorises speech and thought as follows:

	<u>Tagged</u>	<u>Free</u>
<i>Direct:</i>		
Speech	"I have to go," she said	I have to go
Thought	"I have to go," she thought	I have to go
<i>Indirect:</i>		
Speech	She said that she had to go	She had to go
Thought	She thought that she had to go	She had to go

(201)

"Direct free forms", says Chatman, "characterize interior monologue. Indirect free forms do not, precisely because a narrator is presupposed by the third person pronouns and the anterior tense" (201). In the next part of the paragraph <2>, "Unfamiliar room. Unfamiliar scene. Out to where nothing ever shared. Back to where nothing ever shared" (<2> [2]-[5]), the narrative style moves to direct free thought or interior monologue, because subjects, auxiliary verbs, and verbs to indicate personal pronouns and tense are omitted. These fragmentary sentences convey the protagonist's feelings directly. In sentence [6], "From this he had once half hoped some measure of relief might flow", the third person subject 'he' and the verbs indicating the past perfect tense are restored. Although it seems to be objective narration by the effaced narrator, the use of the demonstrative pronoun "this" is noteworthy. If the sentence is narrated from the narrator's viewpoint rather than the protagonist's, it should be "that". Thus, in the paragraph, the viewpoint fluctuates between the narrator's objectivity and the protagonist's subjectivity without any apparent sign. That functions to erode the objectivity of the omniscient narrator.

As a matter of fact, such a shift of viewpoint characterises Joyce's style of narrative. The following part in *Ulysses* serves as an explicit instance.

[1] Enjoy a bath now: clean trough water, cool enamel, the gentle tepid stream. [2] This is my body. [3] He foresaw his pale body reclined in it at full, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled by scented melting soap, softly laved. [4] He saw his trunk and limbs rippled over and sustained, buoyed lightly upward, lemonyellow: his navel, bud of flesh: and saw the dark

tangled curls of his bush floating, floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower. (107)

Sentences [1] and [2] are apparently direct free thought. Although [3] and [4] seem to be objective narration by the third person and in the past tense, they are what Bloom “experiences [...] in anticipation (‘foresaw’)” (Kiberd 1992, 980), that is, indirect free thought.

Thus, in Joyce’s narratives the viewpoint moves between the objectivity of the narrator and the subjectivity of the characters, which gradually spoils the narrator’s omniscience and reliability. As we have seen in the first few paragraphs, the point of view unobtrusively alters. This tendency, the use of the Uncle Charles Principle, is accelerated in the succeeding paragraphs.

2. The Uncle Charles Principle in *Ohio Impromptu*

Now let us return to *Ohio Impromptu*.

<3>

[1] Day after day he could be seen slowly pacing the islet. [2] Hour after hour. [3] In his long black coat no matter what the weather and old world Latin Quarter hat. [4] At the tip he would always pause to dwell on the receding stream. [5] How in joyous eddies its two arms conflowed and flowed united on. [6] Then turn and his slow steps retrace.

(Pause.)

[7] In his dreams—

(Knock.)

[6*] Then turn and his slow steps retrace.

(Pause. Knock.) (446)

Sentences [1] and [4] are the covert narrator’s objective descriptions of the protagonist. [2] and [3] sound to be an observation by the covert narrator as well, but the truncated syntax hints at direct free thought. Moreover, sentence [5], “How in joyous eddies its two arms conflowed and flowed united on” is indirect free thought narrated in the preterite tense through the narrator’s voice but from the viewpoint of the protagonist, which expresses his—not the narrator’s—feeling of loss and longing for the reunion with the lost one. The distinction of viewpoints between the narrator and the protagonist become hardly recognised by readers/audience. In sentence [6], “Then turn and his slow steps retrace”, both viewpoints seem to ambiguously coexist. Grammatically, it would be reasonable to regard it as an observation by the omniscient narrator. That is, from the sentence, the third person subject and an auxiliary verb ‘would’, which appeared in [4] to indicate that the event regularly

happened in the past, are excluded; “Then [he would] turn and his slow steps [would] retrace”. Yet, as it follows the expression of the protagonist’s innermost feelings in indirect free thought, the audience might take it as a continuation of the same kind of thought. Especially in theatre, that continuity would be more appealing for the audience than the grammatical consistency. When the narrative is read aloud by an actor’s voice on stage, the ambiguity of viewpoints is thereby deepened. Moreover, when only [6] is repeated at the request of L’s knock, that would be emphasised.

After the repetition, L urges R to go ahead.

<4>

[1] In his dream he had been warned against this change. [2] Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words, Stay where we were so long along together, my shade will comfort you.

(Pause.)

[3] Could he not—

(Knock)

<4*>

[2*] Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words, Stay where we were so long along together, my shade will comfort you.

(Pause. Knock.) (446)

The first sentence in paragraph <4> is narrated in the past perfect tense, which means ‘he’ was warned before the move, in other words, prior to the ‘Relative Now’. Here, again, “this” is used to suggest that the viewpoint is located in the protagonist. From sentence [2] are omitted the third person subject ‘he’ and ‘had’ to indicate the past perfect tense. Also, the quotation marks are excluded from the direct tagged speech, “Stay where we were so long along together, my shade will comfort you”. All these omissions would induce us to feel that the protagonist himself recalls the “unspoken words”, as if [2] were a first person narrative. The repetition of the sentence, which removed it from the context, underscores that. I shall refer to this paragraph again later.

<5>

[1] Could he not now turn back? [2] Acknowledge his error and return to where they were so long alone together. [3] Alone together so much shared. [4] No. [5] What he had done alone could not be undone. [6] Nothing he had ever done alone could ever be undone. [7] By him alone.

(Pause.) (446)

This paragraph begins with a question, which suggests the viewpoint is not omniscient but unreliable. It rather seems to be the protagonist's self-questioning narrated by the third person and in the past tense: indirect free thought through the narrator's voice. Yet, at the same time, the use of "now" literally suggests the protagonist's 'Relative Now'. Likewise, sentence [2] looks like indirect free thought because of the third person subject "they", but the use of "were" implies the protagonist's viewpoint because, from the narrator's viewpoint, it should be "had been". Thus, in a quite subtle way, the narrator's 'Absolute Now' becomes substituted by the protagonist's 'Relative Now', which is not adequate to indirect thought. The narrative gradually begins deviating from Chatman's categorisation of speech and thought in that the narrator's temporal location is dissolved into the protagonist's. "No" in response to the question could therefore sound not the narrator's objective judgement but the protagonist's own denial of the possibility to undo what he has done in direct free thought. After that, although the restoration of the past perfect tense indicates that the viewpoint returns to the omniscient narrator, what is narrated is nothing but the protagonist's regret, and so we can assume that it is indirect free thought. Consequently, the objectivity of the 'omniscient' narrator gradually becomes unsteady through these subtle grammatical inconsistencies.

After a pause, the narrative shifts from the movement of the protagonist to his difficult situation. In the following paragraph, the narrator abruptly exposes his/her authorship, as I pointed out in the previous chapter. Let us examine the paragraph again in detail.

<6>

[1] In this extremity his old terror of night laid hold on him again. [2] After so long a lapse as if never been. (Pause. Looks closer.) [3] Yes, after so long a lapse that as if never been. [4] Now with the redoubled force the fearful symptoms described at length page forty paragraph four. (Starts to turn back the pages. Checked by L's hand. Resumes relinquished page.) [5] White nights now again his portion. [6] As when his heart was young. [7] No sleep no braving sleep till—(Turns page.)—dawn of day.

(Pause.) (446)

Here, the narrator not only becomes overt but also asserts himself/herself as an author of the narrative in sentence [4] of this paragraph, through mentioning the page number to display his control over the printed and paged book as a whole. This reminds us of Joyce's expressions in "Sirens" such as "As said before" and even

"as said before just now", which Frits Senn regards as "conspicuous avowals of the creator's handiwork" (119). A careful examination of each sentence, however, reveals the ambiguity of the viewpoint towards the narration caused by the deletion of personal pronouns and predicates to indicate the accurate location of the viewpoint, and by the use of a couple of "now"s which imply the protagonist's 'Relatively Now'. Although the first sentence seems to be an objective report of the protagonist by the narrator-author, what the second one expresses is the protagonist's inner subjective thought. That is, in this paragraph, the narrator's authenticity and objectivity becomes undermined, whilst he/she ostensibly asserts himself/herself as an author controlling the whole printed book. What does this antinomy mean?

Kenner observes that, in *Ulysses*, there are two narrators who "command different vocabularies and proceed according to different canons" (1978, 73); one who is responsible for the external world, and another for the internal.

Inside Stephen's mind, where self-appreciation reigns, is a less blithe zone than the penumbra commanded by the dextrous second narrator, whose facility is Protean, whose responsibility is to the sensation reported rather than to the locked and cherished phrase, and whose deftness is seemingly incomparable. (1978, 72)

Referring to the first page of "Aeolus", he argues that the first narrator

is reading the narrative, and reserves the privilege of letting us know what he thinks of it. There is nothing about which he can be more "objective" than about his own performance [...]. (1978, 75)

The narrator of the narrative in *Ohio Impromptu* can also remain most objective about his/her act of narrating. Yet, in paragraph <6> under consideration, sentence [4] in particular, the two narrators seem to ingeniously intermingle with each other.

Furthermore, the single word "Yes" can belong to several levels. Given the stage directions, "Pause. Looks Closer", it seems relevant to attribute the 'Yes' to R on stage, who supposedly found the expression "After so long a lapse that as if never been" unusual enough to confirm. If so, the 'Real Now' of the theatre abruptly intervenes here. The whole paragraph thereby consists of several discourses each of which belongs to a different level and different time: the narrative, the meta-narrations by the narrator-author, and R on stage, and the 'Relative Now',

'Absolute Now', and 'Real Now'. Yet, when it is uttered by the actor playing the part of R, the audience may feel that it belongs not to R but to the actor himself/herself, who halts, confirms, and resumes the lines. In this case, 'Yes' sounds to be the only improvised word by the actor in this 'impromptu', although it is written in the play and therefore can be repeated in every performance. Another possibility is that 'Yes' is written in the text as a narrator-author's word. That is, the narrator-author confirmed what he/she has just narrated by saying the word and repeating the same sentence. 'Yes' is divided into the multi-selves belonging to the multi-levels. It has neither a single subject as its origin nor a single object. This indeterminacy of "Yes" deteriorates the narrator-author's absoluteness.

In sentence [4], the narrator puts himself/herself as the author forward. The use of "Now", however, reveals the predominance of the protagonist's 'Relative Now' over the narrator-author's 'Absolute Now'. In other words, 'Relative Now' begins to replace 'Absolute Now' as the present time of narration. The repetition of 'now' without the subject and the predicate in the next fragmentary sentence accelerates that. Seemingly indirect free thought, thus, inconspicuously transmutes to direct free thought despite of the use of the third person. Consequently, the word 'his' in [6] no longer serves as the ground of indirect free thought. The truncated syntax helps it sound like the protagonist's recall of his own youth. The last sentence of the paragraph with no subject and the predicate can easily be assumed to be direct free thought expressing what the protagonist *is thinking*. On the other hand, the stage directions to turn pages remind the audience of the presence of R and L on the stage and their 'Real Now'.

Thus, in this paragraph, the narrator's viewpoint and temporality are undermined. Instead, the protagonist's 'Relative Now' within the narrative and R, L and the audience's 'Real Now' in the theatre are foregrounded as the 'present' time of narration and the act of reading respectively. From the above, it is relevant to say that Beckett certainly employed the Uncle Charles Principle in his play *Ohio Impromptu*. He, however, devised a more complicated process, as we shall see.

3. Dissolution of the Objective Narrator

After the paragraph we discussed above, the meta-narration that "[l]ittle is left to tell" is repeated twice to mark the beginning of the latter half of the play. It is noteworthy that, unlike the same line in the opening of the play, these are no longer stable as the narrator's meta-narrations from the objective viewpoint because his/her objectivity has already deteriorated. The narrative shifts to a new phase.

<7>

[1] One night as he sat trembling head in hands from head to foot a man appeared to him and said, I have been sent by—and here he named the dear name—to comfort you. [2] Then drawing a worn volume from the pocket of his long black coat he sat and read till dawn. [3] Then disappeared without a word.
(Pause.) (447)

Here appears another figure called a 'man', who reads aloud from a book to the protagonist. His "long black coat" corresponds with what the protagonist wears and, furthermore, with what R and L on stage wear, which strangely implies the similarities between the protagonist and the 'man' as well as between the narrative and the stage.

This paragraph consists of several different styles of discourse. Although the first sentence begins with the narrator's objective report, the use of the verb 'said' indicates the latter half of the same sentence is tagged direct speech by the 'man' without the quotation marks. Yet, the speech is interrupted by someone who wants to veil the "dear name". Who is the intervener? We can never determine who he/she is. It may be natural to regard the phrase of "and here he named the dear name" as meta-narration, as the interruption can be attributed to the narrator-author of the narrative. Our adoption of the Uncle Charles Principle, however, would lead to the conclusion that, since the word 'dear' has an emotional and subjective nuance, it suggests the viewpoint is not located in the objective narrator but in someone for whom the person who sent the man to the protagonist is 'dear'. In other words, if the intervener is the narrator-author, he/she is not an omniscient observer but is involved enough in the story to feel the person 'dear'. This reminds us of Beckett's only work for film, called *Film*, in which the camera eye finally turned out to be not an objective eye but the protagonist's double, who has chased himself. The audience is forced to face the fact that the viewpoint is located inside the story, as if it were one of the characters. Actually, in paragraph <4>, it was the protagonist who mentioned his lost company as "the dear face": "Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words, Stay where we were so long alone together, my shade will comfort you" (446). That implies that the narrator-author and the protagonist are unusually intermingled here. Also, since 'he' in the phrase, "and here he named the dear name", could be either the 'man' or the protagonist, those two are doubled here. Furthermore, taking into consideration again that this narrative is to be read by R on stage, there arises another possibility that R conceals the name while reading for some reason we do not know. For us, it is

impossible to know whether the phrase, “and here he named the dear name”, is written in the book from which R is reading. If the interrupter is R, that means R is not just a reader but has something to do with the event written in the book he/she is reading. Whoever the interrupter is, he/she is not *the other* as an observer but related to the event being narrated and read. It has become difficult to distinguish the narrator and the narrated, or, the subject and the object, because the objective narrator-author as *the other* has hardly been recognisable.

The following paragraph reveals that the man’s visits sometimes recur.

<8>

[1] Some time later he appeared again at the same hour with the same volume and this time without preamble sat and read it through again the long night through. [2] Then disappeared without a word.
(Pause.)

<9>

[1] So from time to time unheralded he would appear to read the sad tale through again and the long night away. [2] Then disappear without a word.
(Pause.) (447)

At a glance, paragraph <8> looks like the narrator-author’s objective report. Yet, the words “this time” (the ‘Relative Now’ of the protagonist) are used instead of ‘then’, and the subject is deleted from the second sentence of the same paragraph. This prepares the second one in the next paragraph. Moreover, “disappeared” in the former shifts to “disappear” in the latter. This minor alternation can be regarded grammatically. The omission of “would” means that the event regularly occurred in the past. The verb “disappear” without the auxiliary verb to indicate the tense, however, could function to suspend the temporality of narration. It may impress the audience with the ‘Relative Now’—the present time of the protagonist. Moreover, here the subject “he” no longer indicates the protagonist but clearly signifies the man. Not only for the narrator but also for the protagonist, the man is the *other* who is to be called by the third person pronoun. Strangely enough, the protagonist now seems to begin taking the role of the narrator, narrating from his own point of view.

<10>

With never a word exchanged they grew to be as one.
(Pause.) (447)

This paragraph consisting of a single sentence depicts that the protagonist and the man become identical,

which suggests that the man is no longer *the other* for the protagonist but more like a double of himself. The third person subject “they” still seems to insist upon the objective viewpoint of the narrator, but, as we have argued, the objectivity has already disintegrated.

Although readers/audiences would not know what that exactly means at this moment, this echoes the visual similarities between R and L on stage, who are “as alike as possible”. The meaning of this similarity, however, is to be interestingly embodied later in the narrative.

<11>

Till the night came at last when having closed the book and dawn at hand he did not disappear but sat on without a word.
(Pause.) (447)

Since this paragraph describes what occurs after the reading is over, as I pointed out earlier, the past-tense narrative catches up with and even gets ahead of what the audience is seeing in their ‘Real Now’, as though the narrative, already printed in the form of a book, anticipated what comes after what is going on ‘here and now’ in front of the audience. This again strongly hints at some unique relation of the narrative to the stage.

The sentence itself looks like an objective description by the third person from the narrator’s objective viewpoint. Yet, as the third person subject indicates the man, there is the possibility that the protagonist is still taking the part of the narrator in place of the real narrator. In this precise sense, the next paragraph is crucial.

<12>

[1] Finally he said, I have had word from—and here he named the dear name—that I shall not come again. [2] I saw the dear face and heard the unspoken words, No need to go to him again, even were it in your power.
[3] (Pause.)
[4] So the sad—
(Knock.)

<12*>

[2*] Saw the dear face and heard the unspoken words. No need to go to him again, even were it in your power.
(Pause. Knock.) (447)

Just as in paragraph <7>, here again the direct tagged speech is interrupted by someone who wants to conceal the “dear name”. This one, however, is more elaborately structured. The subordinate clause, “[...] that I shall not

come again”, is worth focusing on. What makes things complicated is that this is indirect tagged speech quoted by the man in direct tagged speech. It is regarded as what someone with the ‘dear face’ told the man. If the first sentence is narrated in direct tagged speech with quotation marks, it would be like this, “Finally he said, ‘I have had word from [the name of the ‘dear’ one], ‘you shall not go again’””. The word ‘shall’ expresses the ‘dear’ one’s command over the man to strictly forbid visiting the protagonist again. When this is uttered by the man, however, it would sound as if it were the man’s own will; that is the man says, “I shall not come again”. Also, as we have seen, we can never determine who conceals the “dear name”; there are possibilities of meta-narration by the narrator-author as well as intervention by R on stage. Now another possibility exists: the protagonist, taking the role of the narrator and surely knowing who the ‘dear’ one is, keeps the name secret. The man is, however, the double of the protagonist as we saw in paragraph <10>. This confusion becomes more intricate in the second sentence. It may be presumed to be a continuation of the previous part; that is, direct tagged speech of the man (“I saw the dear face and heard the unspoken words”), in which direct tagged speech of the ‘dear’ one (“No need to go to him again, even were it in your power”) is quoted. Nevertheless, who the ‘I’, ‘he’ for ‘him’, and ‘you’ for ‘your power’ in this sentence are, in fact, is not so obvious. Who saw the ‘dear face’ and heard the ‘unspoken words’? Since, as we have so far argued, the protagonist, the man, the narrator, and even R on stage all may feel themselves to be the anonymous company of the protagonist ‘dear’, in spite of the difference of the levels of their existence, they are all possibly the one who “saw the dear face and heard the unspoken words”. Thus, the expression that “they grew to be as one” is embodied here through these subtle but elaborate operations of the various narrative styles. The repetition of the second sentence with the deletion of the first person subject isolates this part from the context, and so promotes the ambiguity. Furthermore, although the ‘dear’ company said by the unspoken words in the protagonist’s dream, “[...] Stay where we were so long together, my shade will comfort you”, the man is the double of the protagonist rather than the shade of the ‘dear’ one.

<13>

[1] So the sad tale a last time told they sat on as though turned to stone. [2] Through the single window dawn shed no light. [3] From the street no sound of reawakening. [4] Or was it that buried in who knows what thoughts they paid no heed? [5] To light of day. [6] To sound of reawakening. [7] What

thoughts who knows. [8] Thoughts, no, not thoughts. [9] Profounds of mind. [10] Of mindlessness. [11] Whither no light can reach. [12] No sound. [13] So sat on as though turned to stone. [14] The sad tale a last time told.

(Pause.) (447-448)

The third person subject ‘they’ and the past-tense verbs in sentences [1] and [2] are the remains of the narrator-author’s voice, but they seem like direct free thought because of the deletion of the predicate in [3]. The resumption of the third person subject ‘they’ seems to indicate that sentence [4] is indirect free thought. Yet, the rest shifts to direct free thought or interior monologue. [4] is a question, [7] an enantiosis, and [8] to [10] are modifications of what has been told. There is no objective narration here; there are inner thoughts that should presumably be attributed only to the protagonist and the man who can no longer be distinguished from each other. Genette calls the interior monologue “immediate speech”, which he distinguishes from free indirect style as follows:

[I]n free indirect speech, the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then *mingled*; in immediate speech, the narrator is obliterated and the character *substitutes* for him. (174)

In the paragraph under consideration, the narrator’s voice at first mingles with the voices of the two characters, then becomes obliterated, and finally substituted by them. Thus the omniscient narrator-author seems to be dissolved into the perfect subjectivity of their interior monologue or immediate speech. There is no *the other* who can tell the story objectively from without. In order to complete this subjectivity, the objectivity of narration must be disintegrated in the previous paragraphs.

<14>

[1] Nothing is left to tell.

(Pause. R makes to close book.

Knock. Book half closed.)

[1*] Nothing is left to tell.

(Pause. R closes book.)

Knock.

Silence. Five seconds.

Simultaneously they lower their right hands to table, raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless.

Ten seconds.

(Fade out.) (448)

This is the end of the play. As we have examined in detail, the second “Nothing is left to tell” could be the same kind of meta-narration as the first line of the play, “Little is left to tell” (445), which is repeated in the middle of the play, by the narrator-author to assert him/herself. Yet, since the narrator-author has been dissolved into the interior monologue of the protagonist and the man, and, given the book half closed, it may be a mechanical repetition of the last phrase by the R. Or R him/herself may declare the end of reading to L, who requests its continuation by knocking. It could also be the actor’s own words to confirm that every line was delivered. This ambiguity eventually undermines our assumption that the first one, or even the phrases of “[l]ittle is left to tell” at the beginning and in the middle of the play are meta-narrations by the narrator-author, because we can never know if they are printed in the book from which the Reader is reading aloud. We cannot exclude the possibility that the phrases are R’s own words. In other words, we are caught up in the indeterminacy of who is the subject to deliver these seeming meta-narrations.

In the closing of the play after the reading has finished, R and L raise their heads and look at each other. At that very moment, they recognise that they are “as alike as possible”, and so there is no *other* between them, just as, in the narrative, the protagonist and the man are identical. R and L on stage, and the protagonist and the man in the narrative are respectively the double of each other. Further, the narrator-author of the narrative, as *the other* who observes from an omniscient viewpoint and asserts himself/herself between the two worlds, has been dissolved into the subjectivity of inner thoughts. Here the dramatic space on stage with two actors’ living bodies and the non-substantial world in the narrative are doubled to form the Möbius strip connecting the visible and the invisible, the reading and the being read, the subject and the object, just like Escher’s “Drawing Hands”.

4. Conclusion

Beckett is presumed to have tried to imitate Joyce’s style, or even invent a pseudo-Joycean narrative by writing this short dramatic piece.

In *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*, Joyce had Stephen tell Lynch:

The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails. (171-172?)

Erwin R. Steinberg, referring to Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist movement in Literature*², which appeared in

1899, enumerates the following as the sources of this idea: Stéphane Mallarmé’s dictum, “the pure work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet”³; Gustave Flaubert’s “An artist must be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful: he should be everywhere felt, but nowhere seen”⁴; and Oscar Wilde’s “The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim”⁵, which was in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published in 1891 (24). Steinberg remarks that what is important is “the degree that [Joyce] was able to implement his definition of the artist, the degree to which he was able to refine himself out of existence in the first half of *Ulysses*, to make himself as author invisible by the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique” (24). If Joyce were among those writers, as Steinberg argues, who were “striving for a greater subjectivity, a more explicit reflection of consciousness” and “attempting to present to their readers their characters’ very souls” (24), that might well explain the reason Joyce employed the Uncle Charles Principle. Yet, the narrator in *Ulysses* can be objective about his/her own narration, as Kenner observes. This antinomy could be attributed to Joyce’s realization of the limit of talking about *the other* from a totally objective viewpoint in his great experiments of narration in *Ulysses*. This limit was expanded by Beckett to the impossibility in the narrative of *Ohio Impromptu*, in that the narrator-author’s objectivity is, as we have examined, disintegrated by dissolving into the subjectivity of his/her own narration.

As we have examined in this paper, the narrator-author of the ghostly book in *Ohio Impromptu* deletes his/her objectivity and even his/her existence from his/her own narrative through a magical manipulation of the viewpoint towards the narration. There is no other as a narrator-author in *Ohio Impromptu*.

This could apply to Beckett himself as a writer. Although Beckett was obsessed with the idea that he hears another’s talking voice in his head, his desperate attempts to tell a story as if both the narrator or his/her character were ‘not I’ are doomed to fail. There always turns out to be *no otherness*.

Notes

¹ For convenience, I number paragraphs and sentences. Each number in < > shows the paragraph number except for the paragraphs of ‘meta-narration’ and repetitions. Each number in [] indicates the sentence number in each paragraph. For example, <1> [1] means the first sentence in the first paragraph of the narrative. A repeated paragraph or sentence is indicated as < * > or [*].

² Symons, Arthur. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1908.

- ³ Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945, p.366. Quoted by David Hayman, *Joyce et Mallarmé*. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1965, p.61.
- ⁴ Flaubert, Gustave. *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert*. Trans., and ed. Francis Steegmuller. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954, p.186.
- ⁵ Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Modern Library, 1926, p.vii.

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