Every work by Samuel Beckett is likely to strike its reader as the discovery of some rich archaeological find. The Beckett specialist, moreover, Joyce’s ideal reader suffering an ideal insomnia, can hardly wait to get his hands on each piece in order to track down that “stiff interexclusiveness” of those tempting relationships to earlier materials. And so it is with Company: here Beckett again locates his work within the familiar network he has made so authentically his own. As readers of these texts, we too have a stake in charting the limits of such an exclusive territory. Yet the investment of our energy is a bit more problematical: almost before we have had a chance to appreciate the work on its own terms, we begin to situate it in the canon through a process Beckett long ago disparaged as “literary bookkeeping.”¹ The dilemma, of course, is by now inevitable. Beckett sets the trap, and we enjoy falling for the bait, especially when the bait is, as in the present instance, a kind of caviar to the general. But there is always a “danger in the neatness of identifications”: it makes us inadvertently undermine the integrity and originality of Company at the same time that it encourages us to elevate its status as yet another victory in the battle this writer’s words continue to wage with form. The point of this essay will be, then, twofold: to demonstrate how Company draws on the allusive texture of Beckett’s formidable
literary past and to show how he now transforms it into something we may not have seen in precisely these same terms before.

In *Company* the specific allusions to Beckett’s works are legion. Let us pause for a moment to reflect on the following *catalogue raisonné*, which is, it must be pointed out in advance, by no means complete. We might begin with *Endgame*, where Hamm is one of the first to complain of something dripping in his head. “Perhaps it’s a little vein,” he speculates. *Endgame* as source material is particularly promising for, like *Company*, it features Zeno’s “grain by grain in the mind” as well as a possible encounter with a dead rat. “What an addition to company that would be!” (p. 16), we read here, “A rat long dead” (p. 27). “If I don’t kill that rat he’ll die,” Clov, we recall, had long ago lamented. Or, to keep our genres straight, we might prefer to begin with *Malone Dies*, which offers us the additional satisfaction of a narrator, hero, and novelist *manqué* who, like this one, “on his back in the dark” (p. 7), suffers a similar decay of lying—and in both senses of the word. But what precisely does any text signify when it speaks of a protagonist “loosely as lying” (p. 55)? “Which in other words,” *Company* continues, “of all the innumerable ways of lying is likely to prove in the long run the most endearing?” (p. 55). The pun on “lying” will come up again, for this “fable” will resume “where the act of lying cut it short” (p. 62). Beckett, however, constructs his narrative truth from just such a pregnant series of lyings-in. Positions, once physical, now turn to Watt’s “semantic succour”: “From time to time with unexpected grace you lie” (p. 61). A little language is, once again, a dangerously animated thing.

*Malone Dies* provides the proper atmosphere for a variety of other items: it uses the same anti-novelistic strategies of inventing names for characters along the way and then quickly dismissing or replacing them, it wonders aloud about its own narrative authority (is the figure under a sheet clothed or naked?), and it suggests a number of possible topics that might be taken up in the interests of the narrative. *Malone Dies* also delivers a prominent feature to *Company* in the shape of memory, for it shares with it the same cutting retort a mother makes to a
young boy when he asks her if the sky is not in reality much less distant than it appears to be. Let us look at the different shapes Beckett has the same “memory” assume as it passes from one literary permutation to the next:

One day we were walking along the road, up a hill of extraordinary steepness, near home I imagine, my memory is full of steep hills, I get them confused. I said, The sky is further away than you think, is it not, mama? It was without malice, I was simply thinking of all the leagues that separated me from it. She replied, to me her son, It is precisely as far away as it appears to be. She was right. But at the time I was aghast. I can still see the spot, opposite Tyler’s gate.3

You make ground in silence hand in hand through the warm still summer air. It is late afternoon and after some hundred paces the sun appears above the crest of the rise. Looking up at the blue sky and then at your mother's face you break the silence asking her if it does not appear much less distant than in reality it is. For some reason you could never fathom this question must have angered her exceedingly. For she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten. (Company, pp. 10-11)

Although in Company Beckett carefully suppresses the autobiographical details of one of the first “loopings of the loop” at the Leopardstown racecourse near his boyhood home in Foxrock, a suburb of Dublin, the memory, distilled this time, lingers on—and not only for its author. In using a scene he has used before, Beckett makes us share in his novelistic history: our memory in this instance is carefully focused all the way back to Malone Dies. Beckett has taken a detail from his own life and elevated it into fiction, a fiction he counts upon us to remember. Seen in this context, the haunting lines of Company begin to refer to us and to our own situation as Beckett’s reader: “Yes I remember” (pp. 16 and passim).

Despite all these close approximations—and there will be others—one must be careful not to overemphasize the similarities uniting Malone Dies and Company, for the latter text will be
just as liberal in its borrowings from other Beckett works. The window looking west and the “some movement however small” (p. 20) remind us of Still, as does the highly specialized vocabulary of “withershins” (pp. 38, 50), which, contrary to “deasil” in the earlier work, means to move in a direction contrary to the apparent course of the sun, that is, counterclockwise and therefore unlucky. The computation of distance traveled is right out of Enough, though here we read about another character “with bowed head on the verge of the ditch” (pp. 14–15) who converts “into yards” (p. 15) (the ditch in this case coming from Molloy or Waiting for Godot). The voice “now from one quarter and now from another” (p. 15) re-creates the staging of That Time, and a voice avoiding the first person singular brings us back to Not I, as does Croker’s Acres, a real place near Beckett’s childhood home. Not I also brings to Company its Listener, called in this case the “hearer,” and yields as well the special emptiness of “No trace of love” (p. 47) and the disturbing imprecision of not knowing whether one is “standing or sitting or lying” (p. 26), though in this instance “kneeling” is omitted from the battery of possible posturings. The “God save you little master” (p. 17) in the vignette of the old beggar woman resurrects the whole bloody business of a savior from Waiting for Godot, a work that will be referred to again when, like Estragon, a female character assaulting the voice’s memory murmurs appealingly, “Listen to the leaves” (p. 48). The speculation on crawling is from How It Is; the “comfort” of mathematics makes us think of Dan Rooney (“Not count! One of the few satisfactions in life?”); an unwanted pregnancy and a painful delivery resemble the uneasy situation in First Love; “conjuring of something out of nothing” (p. 53) recycles Watt’s lexical predicament; the “All you had seen was cloud” (p. 25) reshapes the central metaphor in “... but the clouds ...”; the “dissolve” (p. 42) to a father sitting on a bench in a summerhouse uses a technical option of Beckett’s “comic and unreal” Film, as does “of course the eye. Filling the whole field. The hood slowly down. Or up if down to begin. The globe. All pupil. Staring up. Hooded. Bared. Hooded again. Bared again” (pp. 20–21); the “footfalls” (p. 14 and passim) and the “unnamable” (p. 32)
bring to light the play and the novel of the same names, and with this in view, a “Devised deviser devising it all for company” (p. 46; emphasis mine) especially resembles the May who so addictively revolves “it all” as she paces back and forth before us on stage; the “Be again” (p. 20) repeats a futile command of Krapp’s Last Tape, a work that shares with this one a “lamp left lit above you” (p. 59); a “tiny cycle” (p. 17) brings to mind those misshapen vehicles we have seen before in pastures similarly “strewn” with uneaten sheeps’ “red placentae” (p. 35); the absurd position of “Head resting mainly on occipital bump aforesaid. Legs joined at attention. Feet splayed ninety degrees. Hands invisibly manacled crossed on pubis” (p. 57) sounds like a further development of the physiognomic irregularity we have met before in Imagination Dead Imagine; “Hodgkin’s disease or if you prefer Percival Pott’s” (p. 61) is medical terminology as technical as the “Bright’s disease, Grave’s disease, strangury and fits” specified in Murphy, where “conation” is also an option; the “Palest blue against the pale sky” (p. 25) asks us to reconsider two prominent images from the ruins of Lessness, a piece inevitably referred to in the repeated appearance of such “lessness” words as “moonless,” “starless” (p. 54), “cloudless” (p. 25 and passim), “bootless” (p. 55), and, finally, “comfortless” (p. 55); “the unthinkable last of all” (p. 24) repeats a moment of closure from The Lost Ones, which also brings to Company a French “esquisse” (p. 45) in place of its own “aperçu” and makes us consider a similar geometry of space that replaces cones, cylinders, and quincunxes with oblongs, rhomboids, and a rather spectacular “rustic hexahedron” (p. 38); and “Better a sick heart than none” (p. 26) messes up the same biblical quotation that Winnie mangles in Happy Days, though in this case “Better a sick heart than none.” An M and a W put in cameo appearances in this prose tract, and we should be relieved to see that Belacqua Shuah, Dante’s ever-present Florentine lute-maker, is also here. At long last, a text bids him a tender and generous farewell for, having waited so long in Beckett’s fiction to be purged, he is “now perhaps singing praises with some section of the blest at last” (p. 60). “Yes,” we say again as we read this text, “I remember.”
The mention of Dante’s “first quarter-smile” (p. 60) might make us think that at least some of the allusions in Company point back to a literary tradition that is not entirely of Beckett’s own making. Yet in this citation, the emphasis is not so much on Dante as it is on Beckett’s earlier use of him, that special Dante appropriated all the way back in More Pricks Than Kicks and the figure of Belacqua who walks through Beckett’s fiction all the way up to The Lost Ones and Company. Beckett has taken a small piece of The Divine Comedy and therefore made it an integral part of his own intimate repertory. He has done the same with his gleanings from the Bible. “Better a sick heart than none” is Beckett, not the book of Psalms, and the memory is of Winnie rather than of David. Shakespeare will be similarly colonized: “labour lost” is the same kind of residual allusion to the Bard that skirts the surface of such earlier works as Footfalls, That Time, Come and Go, and Happy Days, to mention only a few of the most notable. The “half blind” (p. 16), “the shadowy light” (pp. 18–19), the “dark” that “lightens” (p. 19), and the “Died on to dawn and never died” (the last phrase by way of A Piece of Monologue) similarly resurrect Milton and more particularly Beckett’s earlier use of him in such works as Happy Days, where an intrepid Winnie opens act two with a direct quotation from Paradise Lost: “Hail, holy light.” Beckett, of course, can be counted on to elevate Joyce and his own indebtedness to this modern master to such distinguished company: “Bloom of adulthood. Imagine a whiff of that” (p. 38). Dante, Shakespeare, the Bible, Milton, Joyce: the company Beckett keeps is rarely uncertain. External allusions in this work are primarily there to remind us of the same literary patterns Beckett has urged us to consider before as he weaves the web of his own private mythology.

The shape of fictional memory in Company will also extend to the characteristic intrusion of learned vocabulary that we associate with so many other enterprises, the “hog’s setae” of Happy Days, the “Schimmel” of From an Abandoned Work, the “ramdam” of All That Fall, the “tremolo” of The Lost Ones, the “passing rack” of Footfalls, or the “viduity” of Krapp’s Last Tape, which the seedy hero actually looks up for us in a dictionary. In
Company the hermetic language is extended, this time embracing such a motley of items as transportation, the French language, and human anatomy. Let us begin with the “De Dion Bouton” (p. 14), the automobile manufactured in Paris circa 1904 and conveniently parked in this story in the family’s coach house. The text will make a sly reference to this same vehicle later on when, in the subsequent vignette that takes place in the summerhouse, the characters sit “vis-à-vis” (p. 39). The De Dion Bouton was one of the few automobiles that allowed for this possibility. It featured a four-passenger model called, in fact, the “Vis-à-Vis”: seats faced one another and the steering mechanism was placed in the center. “Vis-à-vis” neatly links recherché automotive history with recondite language study. Here Beckett has some fun with the French pronunciation of “Haitch,” the name this text momentarily considers for its “hearer,” yet another English word, like the “he,” the “him,” and the “hope” of the same paragraph, which also begins with an “Haitch.” The French language, of course, considers two phonemes for “h,” the h-muet and the h-aspiré: “Let the hearer be named H. Aspirate. Haitch. You Haitch are on your back in the dark. And let him know his name. No longer any question of his overhearing” (p. 31). “H” is therefore no name at all for the simple reason that it is so difficult to pronounce for a French speaker: “Then let him not be named H. Let him be again as he was. The hearer. Unnamable. You” (p. 32). The fictional language for the human anatomy in Company will prove as esoteric and in at least one instance similarly tricky. “All the way from calcaneum to bump of philogenitiveness” (p. 51) is a mistake in the published text that should read, according to Beckett, “All the way from calcaneum to bump of philoprogenitiveness.” Like Krapp we are sent scurrying to the dictionary: philoprogenitiveness means tending to produce offspring, prolific; of, relating to, or characterized by love of offspring. This makes for a properly improper pun; the bump is phallic and also takes us back to Hamm’s “accursed progenitor.”

Before entirely abandoning the arrant pedantry of what this text calls “readier reference” (p. 42)—which for the purpose of the argument will force us to omit the “i” in the Beckett tradi-
tion and thereby take for reader reference—let us notice some of those narcissistic rhetorical flourishes that have become characteristic specialties in the Beckett iconography. The whole motif, in fact, of appealing so slyly to the reader has been a pose taken up before. *Murphy* makes a novelistic pact with its reader by directly addressing him as the “gentle skimmer,” and May in *Footfalls* calls our attention to an old Mrs. Winter, “whom the reader will remember,” though unfortunately no such reader, “strange or otherwise,” has been able to track her down, much to our dismay and frustration. Several other linguistic patterns will accompany us back to still other voices in narrative situations we have already confronted. “Up to a point” (p. 12 and passim), for example, reenergizes a critical moment of sexual innuendo in *Enough*, and “nought anew” (p. 15 and passim) recycles the “nothing new” (by way of Ecclesiastes) on which the sun shone, having no alternative, all the way back in *Murphy*. The use of a simple word like “home” will also prove similarly self-referential. In *Malone Dies* we read, “The man has not yet come home. Home,” which *Company* renders as “And never once overstepped a radius of one from home. Home!” *Not I* also picks up on the same rhetoric of meaning: “. . . one evening on the way home . . . home! . . . a little mound in Croker’s Acres . . . ,” as does *Ill Seen Ill Said*, where the linguistic phenomenon takes place three times:

At this rate it will be black night before she reaches home. Home!

How find her way home? Home! Even as the homing bird.

Alone night fallen she makes her home. Home!

In each case the elementary repetition of a single word makes a simple sentence wax lyrical in its yearning for a lost security forever out of reach. But foremost among all these syntactical echoes is the word-sentence “Imagine” (p. 7 and passim), which was, of course, used so effectively in *Imagination Dead Imagine* and again in *All Strange Away*. Consider “Imagine” and one comes to see straightaway the difficulties inherent in any of these prose undertakings. As a single word, capitalized and
followed by a period, the reader first takes it as a verb. The subject, however, falls far from the verb and lands, characteristically, somewhere in the void. Grammatically, the subject is supposed to be understood, but it is also supposed to be suppressed, a pronoun the person and number of which we expect will be conventionally clarified in the context of what follows. Yet Company will use convention to confound and expand beyond any easy presuppositions. “Imagine,” then, functions simultaneously as an imperative, an invocation, and a casual observation addressing both the narrative voice and the reader. Once invited in this way to utilize his own creative faculties in conjunction with this text, the gentle and unsuspecting “skimmer” embarks on a subtle adventure that implicates everything and everyone, past allusions as well as present readings, as the title Company so disingenuously suggests.

But the allusions that really make the difference in Company are not the specific self-references this particular text makes sometimes subtly, sometimes aggressively, to so many of the earlier works. What matters here is the evocation of a new pattern of memory that refers to the earlier works not so much nominally as it does stylistically. For Company offers us two distinct rhythms, one for mind and quite another for heart. Both provide us with uncertain “company”:  

Yet a certain activity of mind however slight is a necessary adjunct of company. That is why the voice does not say, You are on your back in the dark and have no mental activity of any kind. The voice alone is company but not enough. (P. 9)

This particular voice, however, is woefully “reason-ridden” (p. 33); it makes for some good company, “but not enough.” The highly cerebral reflections on the nature of the voice, its origin, its person, and its number, soon turn in another direction. A vignette suddenly intrudes, providing, one suspects, more welcome “company” in the shape of remembrances of things past. Memory, as in Krapp’s Last Tape, adds a significant and powerful dimension to Company, one that will be employed with tantalizing restraint. The appearance of these digressions from the
current dire situation, as suddenly represented by the voice in the dark, gives the piece far greater depth. The particularized exploration of a room and a desperate state of affairs becomes animated when the voice adopts a tone registering the possibility of a human existence that supplies us with background as well as psychological texturing. These scenes are, then, crucial: they expand the terrain the reader and the protagonist traverse in the course of this story. They also offer us a powerful inducement to read this work autobiographically. For the scenes of memory have about them a highly charged emotional impact, a deeply "felt" disposition, that appeals to a reader's inclination to identify a heart behind the mind we have so often encountered:

You stand at the tip of the high board. High above the sea. In it your father's upturned face. Upturned to you. You look down to the loved trusted face. He calls to you to jump. He calls, Be a brave boy. The red round face. The thick moustache. The greying hair. The swell sways it under and sways it up again. The far call again, Be a brave boy. Many eyes upon you. From the water and from the bathing place. (P. 18)

But autobiography is always a trap; Beckett denies its certainty. His text repeatedly reminds us that these vignettes contain "creatures" that are an integral part of the emerging "fable," the long dissolution that is every Beckett hero's life. However much they may conform to the known or suspected details of the author's life (the Irish names of roads and stores, the birth on Good Friday, the suggestion of upper-middle-class affluence in the make of a fancy car), the personal flavor imparted in these very moving scenes does not escape their role in the structured and highly self-conscious work of art. For like the origin of the voice itself, these scenes provide a problematic dimension to Company and remain inextricably tied to everything else in the text. Isolating them at the expense of the more intellectual reflections by "one on his back in the dark" (p. 7) succeeds only in altering the work. An autobiographical explication of Company, like one of Malone Dies, which in this respect it so closely resembles, will be, necessarily, reductive.
The situation, to borrow a phrase from *Murphy*, is "less Words-worthy": these vignettes present no "spots of time," but offer instead the "limits to part’s equality with whole."6

Autobiography has therefore been a fiction, like everything else in this tale, for "saying" is inevitably "inventing." The scenes culled from the past bring not memory but a construct in the guise of memory to the shape that Beckett’s narrativity assumes. They also impart a special movement to the text, for unlike the rhythm of reason, constantly backtracking on itself to amend a phrase, repeat it with minor variation, or take up yet another possible alternative, the rhythm of memory, even when fabricated by a voice in the dark, is swift, incisive, and direct. It is also honest, at least as candid as any made-up memory can be. Yet this too is necessarily imagined. Some of these memories have even been given to the voice secondhand, things told to him by others and then passed off as his own:

You first saw the light in the room you most likely were conceived in. . . . The midwife was none other than a Dr Hadden or Haddon. Straggling grey moustache and hunted look. It being a public holiday your father left the house soon after his breakfast with a flask and a package of his favourite egg sandwiches for a tramp in the mountains. There was nothing unusual in this. But on that particular morning his love of walking and wild scenery was not the only mover. But he was moved also to take himself off and out of the way by his aversion to the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery. Hence the sandwiches which he relished at noon looking out to sea from the lee of a great rock on the first summit scaled. . . . When he returned at nightfall he learned to his dismay from the maid at the back door that labour was still in swing. . . . He at once hastened to the coachhouse some twenty yards distant where he housed his De Dion Bouton. He shut the doors behind him and climbed into the driver's seat. . . . Though footsore and weary he was on the point of setting out anew across the fields in the young moonlight when the maid came running to tell him it was over at last. Over! (Pp. 12-14)

*Company’s* so-called memory plays tricks with imagination: things told to us are sometimes indistinguishable from events we actually remember on our own. To amplify this point, Beckett follows the scene of birth with a much less personalized
one of a child in a nursery: "A mother’s stooping over cradle from behind. She moves aside to let the father look. In his turn he murmurs to the newborn. Flat tone unchanged. No trace of love" (p. 47). The presence of Beckett’s Proust hovers everywhere in the background. For there we read how memory shapes the past: “It presents the past in monochrome. The images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by imagination, and are equally remote from reality.”7 To remember in Company is therefore to imagine. And despite the text’s disclaimer of imagining “ill” from time to time, the memories we get here are as fluid as Proust’s—or as our own. In the vignette of the summerhouse, for example, the voice will make a double journey into the past before returning us to the present. Freely moving “to and fro,” as in Rockaby, the voice moves from distant past, to more distant past, to less distant past, mixing an encounter with his lover and her pregnancy (“She is late” [p. 39]) with a memory of his father reading Punch with yet another memory of the touch of two naked bodies in bed. Time is all at once set free, as though the distinct voices of A, B, and C in That Time now meet in one. Memory can work wonders, especially when it has been so explicitly crafted to do so.

In Company, moreover, Beckett gives rapid rhythm to the voice of memory and slow rhythm to the voice of reason, then lets them play against one another in vigorous counterpoint. This technique brings much finesse as well as enormous vitality to the whole, setting in motion a dynamic conflict of styles within the writing of the fiction itself. Mind and heart wage a war of words in two competing tempos. We never know for sure just when one will intrude its distinctive presence on the other. Emotion fights with reason, and the as yet unidentified narrator will make clever use of the latter to recover from the devastating effects of the former, which, despite his valiant attempts, he does not appear likely to control.

What makes Company a special edition in the Beckett canon is the risk he now takes with the dualism he has balanced so delicately in this work: heart wins hands down in the end. Despite the reason-ridden intellect, emotionally charged memories, no matter how formulated, recast, and patched up,
shine through in the end in the shape of haunting images that will quite simply not go away. Their successful battle with what Molloy calls “the falsetto of reason” makes them avoid any taint of sloppy sentimentality. All that remains for Krapp, too, after all is said and done and taped, is one essential image from the past: “the eyes—like chrysolite.” As we sit in the theater and watch Krapp with our own eyes, all that exists for us is an image too: an old man isolated on stage space is suddenly not alone. Staring into the void, he is actually staring at us. The image has offered us an unexpected instance of communion with a private world in the public forum that is theater. Company will similarly offer us reminiscences in the form of images, and even though they represent loss, they provide the reader with powerfully drawn scenes that effectively counter and enrich the narrator’s diminished state. “Now I’ll wipe out everything but the flowers,” the narrator of Enough intones near the end of his quite different fictional journey. Everything disappears but the words and the images they can be depended on to create.

Consider some of these images: a mother scolds a young boy for no apparent reason after he asks a question, typically, about depth and perception; a small boy teeters on the limb of a tree or contemplates a jump into deep waters and into his waiting father’s arms; a youth finds a hedgehog and imposes his will upon it, ending in death and a loss of innocence; a young man meets his lover and confronts his culpability in her pregnancy, if such is indeed the case; a grown man now walks by himself in the fields near his childhood home but recollects in tranquility his beloved father’s “shade”; an old man finds he moves unsteadily, suddenly conscious of the fact that he has been deserted forever by the warmth of his once youthful vigor—these scenes evoke the arbitrary pattern of loss in one man’s existence. Everything “falls” and soon fades away. Any renewed effort of mathematics or science to define or locate the voice that broadcasts these images pales by comparison with the striking quality of such sharp visual stimulation. For the company Beckett keeps is strictly with these words and the metaphors they have been made to create. They will never leave us
“alone,” for they constantly return us to the initial charge of this text, which was, we should remember, to “imagine.” For even in the midst of memory, Beckett’s *Company* has been asking us to “imagine” along with it. “You may imagine his thoughts before and after as he strode through the gorse and heather” (p. 13), the voice states of a father anxiously awaiting his child’s birth, an appeal to the reader soon to be echoed by another as the same man is discovered alone in his De Dion Bouton: “You may imagine his thoughts as he sat there in the dark not knowing what to think” (p. 14). So imagination is not quite dead, at least as far as the narrative strength of *Company* is concerned. Like the sun in *Murphy*—there is another image—it shines through once again, having no real alternative. Imagination therefore becomes the only possibility for company, for it is always full of potentiality. Time hangs “heavy already on our hands” (p. 29), it is true, but even the movement of two hands on a watch provides “variations and constants” (p. 59) ripe for narrative exploration. And when this story ends, there still remain many “matters yet to be imagined” (p. 27), “form and dimensions yet to be devised.”

The “fable of one fabling . . . in the dark” (p. 63) has therefore not left us in the dark at all. This fiction may have set out to expose the limits and mechanisms of its own fictivity, but in the process of its reasoning—which in this text “reasons ill” (p. 12)—we recognize that the voice that has all along been dripping inside this character’s head is nothing less than a human heart. “A heart, a heart in my head,” cried out Beckett’s Hamm long ago. And as long as Beckett’s characters have the miniaturized tenderness of these words, this company, the present fable seems bent on reassuring us, can never be entirely in vain. Mixing memory and desire, the voice of *Company* gives shape to memory and in so doing offers us lies like truth. The last word of this text, set by itself in a lonely little paragraph, is “Alone” (p. 63). But that too is a word we have seen before in the Beckett canon, and that too presents us with an intimate image we can only encounter on our own. For we are never really alone once we hold Beckett’s text in our hands. Devised allusions to the past and to past works have therefore fostered a magnificent
new illusion where we may have least expected it: just who is the narrator and who is the company really does not matter when the reader's regular guest is Beckett's unnamable voice.

5. Letter from Samuel Beckett to Martha Fehsenfeld dated 18 November 1980. My thanks to Martha Fehsenfeld for calling my attention to this mistake in the printed text of Company.