

Good example of  
devise, deviser,  
device, devising, and  
its variation of  
meaning i...

[Business](#), [Company](#)



In Samuel Beckett's *Company*, he uses variations of the word "devise," "deviser," "device," and "devising." In this paper the use of these words, which are used by Beckett with some frequency will be analyzed. The words will be analyzed as per their meaning, and in how "meaning" fit the contextual elements of Beckett's text. The paper will be argued from an etymological perspective, to investigate whether words have different forms of meaning, and how Beckett may be playing with the meaning of words. Although Beckett bombards the text with formations of the word "devise" in a seemingly absurdist gesture of wordplay, the point of the story is deeply philosophical. Beckett is asking us to think about what it means to be a human being in the face of the other. What is the self? Is it a devise of a higher power? Or is the self a construct of others' wills and desires? At the end of the day, with all devising, what is the point of being?

The first point to make is that it must be said that the story is a fiction. It begins and uses all elements of fictional devices. The story begins with a manifestation of a voice. A voice that speaks out. It should be said here that Beckett is playing with the reader's head here. Obviously the story is a device. Language is a device. To drive home the point of how nothing can be reduced to "meaning," Beckett plays with the devising of the deviser. The text begins with a voice, one that "comes to one in the dark. Imagine." (427, line 1). Beckett is talking about communication between the self and an unnamed other — where the play of communication is made incontrovertible by a device (427, line 9). Here, "device" refers to a mediator between two voices. In this way, Beckett is playing on the meaning of device as a piece of technology as one would use the device to translate sentences passed back

and forth between two parties as a way of analysis. Yet, the meaning of “device,” transforms at the end of the paragraph just cited to “devising,” which in its verb form means a way to hatch a plan (427, line 13).

The second point to make is that there is the use of grammatical person in the story. Beckett uses the second person voice in the story, and he refers to a “you.” The story reads as if both the reader and the protagonist are the same; “you are on your back” hearing a voice (433, line 8). The sense is one of both devising, hatching a plan, with a device, with an instrument— a devising all for the sake of the company— “In another dark or in the same another devising it all for company” (433, line 25). Beckett proposes a philosophical question in his use of devising and devises. Who is doing the devising? To devise, to formulate thoughts, especially those thoughts that formulate in one’s mind? Are the thoughts that arise in the dark, lying on one’s back, the voice of a deviser or they the thoughts devised by the protagonist? Who devises it all? Beckett writes, “His soever who devises it all. In the same dark as his creature or in another.” Who is the source of devising.

Third, despite the sheer abdication of reason, the story, albeit fiction, has a philosophical point. The text is reminiscent of a philosophical text by René Descartes, who in his *Meditations*, wonders if God is an evil genius devising his thoughts. A malicious demon of supreme power who can in his devises deceive the self (Descartes 15). Devising, in this way, takes on a negative connotations, implying that one’s thoughts are not one’s own. They are for the sake of the company, which both alludes to a God, or to the demands of society. In the story, it is not clear who the voice belongs to and how it is

orchestrated— “ Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself.

Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that” (435, lines 6-7).

The fourth point to make is that Beckett likes to repeat words over and again so as to shake off meaning in a story. “ Device” is used in all of these formulations, and in repetition, to put forth the thesis that one’s voice is also the voice of another: “ He speaks of himself as of another” (435, line 7). The test is being with the other, and the task of being alone, in solitude. There is always a devise, a devising, a deviser. In every corner, Beckett’s language becomes creepier, a fear of the other— “ on all fours devising it all for company” (435, line 25). The possible encounters the protagonist seems to make him worried about encounters can be a great deception caused by the deviser. Do all encounters have meaning— and are all encounters for the sake of the company? The protagonist encounters a dead rat. Is he to devise meaning? It is interesting that the word devise as a verb implies meaning-making. Meaning-making is a device, and language itself is a devise— “ A conation of some kind however feeble” (435-436, line 1). We are confronted not only with the voices of our consciousness, which seem to be devised by another, but our memories also do not seem to be our own. Beckett is using the repetition of the words “ devise” to play on how our memories, and language itself is a device. Our memories of the past often come to us as voices of others, those in our company.

Whether it is the voice of an “ other” saying “ naughty boy” (433, line 19) or another feeling remains. Is Mrs. Coote the voice of another? The narrator is obviously troubled by the voices he hears, and Mrs. Coote must be either an authority figure who called him a “ naughty boy.” The words arise in his

mind's eye as devised. Of course, Beckett is playing on how involuntary thoughts can invade our mind, especially when we are troubled by something, or in the search of finding our voice. Which voice is one's own regardless of the company?

It is interesting that “device” and “devise” have very similar spelling. The repetition by Beckett makes one think of the word. It's like the game of repeating the same word over and again in an endless cycle — the word loses its meaning. To devise implies to implement a vision — a vision for the future, perhaps? A device, a noun, is the tool that implements this vision. But devising, and the deviser, become jumbled up in the text as either belonging to the self — the protagonist — to the voice of the company or to the voice of God the great deviser, who “deceiver” but the words seem to arise in the mind when reading the text. The deviser, the deceiver, the conceiver, may or may not be good, or have our best interests in mind. Beckett does not employ the word. Are we meant to make a connection between “deceiver” and “deviser” which also have similar spellings and sound similar to each other? By repeating the words, the words elide meaning.

Truths about reality, and our encounter with others in reality lose their meaning in this story. Who has our best designs in mind, who devises the path of the self. By playing on these words and their meaning, Beckett plays with the philosophical connotations of freedom and the limits of one's will. For Beckett's protagonist, this thought process of devising brings him to an encounter with the immanent that which is front of him, the dead rat, the hedgehog. The text, as it continues apace, becomes deformed itself. Not only are the encounters more animalistic, going from an immaterial deviser to

the immaterial sense of the voice, to the physical immanent world of dirt and grime.

### **In the passage that is at heart the best exemplification of Beckett's story is:**

Devised deviser devising it all for company. In the same figment dark as his figments. In what posture and if or not as hearer in his for good not yet devised. Is not one immovable enough? Why duplicate this particular solace? Then let him move. Within reason. On all fours. A moderate crawl torso well clear of the ground eyes front alert. If this no better than nothing cancel. If possible. And in the void regained another motion. Or none.

### **Leaving only the most helpful posture to be devised. But to be going on**

with let him crawl. Crawl and fall. Crawl again and fall again. In the same figment dark as his other figments (443, line 17-24).

Finally, the last point to make is one of lying on one's back in devising. In this passage, Beckett brings three formulations of "devised, deviser, "devising it all for company. To devise is always a figment of the imagination, and in truth, the protagonist is merely a four-legged creature. What may be called thinking Beckett decomposes. Is it important the prefix "de-" begins all the words of devising, deviser, devised? The prefix "de-" connotes words that mean breaking down: for example decomposing, destructing. The crux of Beckett's use of "devise" is very much trying to show how devising is actually futile, and it is an act of lying on one's back, thinking of plans, of a vision, of what to do next, as Beckett writes, "Devising figments to temper

his nothingness” (443, lines 14-15).

This story makes it seem as if Beckett is implying that consciousness is a disease, an infliction of voices that become interpreted by “the company” as meaning. Beckett makes mention of a lower order — as if to imply there is a higher order. What all devising does, at least in how one can interpret this story, is only a figment. There is no higher order — for, in truth, everyone is on their back. What is considered to be devising is just a figment of being a creature on all fours. In truth, all is in the void, swirling around in mechanistic motion, and in this motion the human being crawls on all fours and what is devised, is the infliction of consciousness, “in the same figment dark as his other figments” (443, line 24).

Beckett is saying all words are “inane.” Human beings are creatures on all fours. We are creatures stuck to the earth, on all fours, or on our backs, supine. Beckett also repeats this image: crawling on all fours, and the reality of lying on the ground, looking straight up, flat on one’s back. What is interesting is that this is probably the position of the protagonist throughout the entire story. It conjures the image of a person waking up lying flat on their back, and the result of their stream of consciousness is this story? Lying on one’s back gives an interesting perspective. As Beckett points out, the person lying supine, “toils in vain” (450, line 2). The reference to lying supine is the last paragraph of the story. The first paragraph of the story mentions being supine as well, in the dark (427). In another place in the text, the idea of posture is connected with devising: “And that his posture there remained to be devised” (442, line 11).

Of course, other interpretation of this story could be brought forward. At one

level of meaning, one can read “ Company” as not making any declaration on being together in society. The story can be read simply as a word play. As written earlier in this essay, it is a game of repeating the same word over and again until the words have no meaning. But in fact, and it is here that the point is pressed. What does one do with meaning? If all devising for the sake of the company is futile, and if all devising is a figment, what then is Beckett’s resolution?

In conclusion, Beckett ends the word with the utter aloneness of the human person, when all devising has left them in an utter state of “ alone.” The last word is somber: “ Alone” (450). Beckett leaves us with a stark image of being alone in the world. The message is that ultimately one is alone. What to do with this aloneness? It seems Beckett is saying — we are all left to our own devices.

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