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In 1967, Maurice Harmon's *Modern Irish Literature 1800-1967: A Reader's Guide* (Dolmen Press), offering standard information for Irish readers in Ireland about Irish literature, did not mention Samuel Beckett. A more recent version (Wolfhound Press) published in 1977 includes Beckett matter-of-factly with other modern Irish writers (Mays, "Beckett's Irish Roots" 19). Not until the spring of 1991 did the first book-length study of Beckett as an Irish writer appear—John P. Harrington's *The Irish Beckett* (Syracuse University Press). As recently as 1980, the bibliography of the Modern Language Association listed Beckett only in its sections on French literature. In 1981 the editors began to include him in the sections on French and on Irish literature. Later MLA listings continue to include him in both sections.

But Beckett is not simply inching his way into the Irish literary tradition. The most recent significant news about this writer is what Linda Ben-Zwi refers to as his "Dublin-izing" (2). The central feature of the 1991 Dublin Theatre Festival was its Beckett Festival. The Gate Theatre presented in nine separate stagings all nineteen of Beckett's plays. Trinity College Dublin held seminars of scholarly presentations on his works and offered impressive exhibitions of manuscript materials. And Radio Telefis Eireann broadcast more than fifteen television and radio productions for the three weeks the larger Festival was being held. Commenting on this flurry of activities, Michael Colgan, Director of the Gate Theatre, said that the time had arrived "to introduce a Dublin Audience to this great writer who needs to be looked at in Ireland" (Schreibman and O'Halloran 1-2).

These events, however, do make us forget Beckett's life-long denial of professional identity with the land of his birth, a denial so vigorous that it has become a literary joke. In 1979 the Irish writer David Handy has two characters, Keegan and Crossan, from his novel *In Guilt and in Glory* debate Beckett's literary nationalism:

> "[Joyce] would be anachronistic [now]. We seem to produce men for our times. Our guru now must be Mr. Beckett."
>
> "Ah."
>
> "I fear his cockerel's head."
>
> "He has nothing to say."

> "Excuse me. He has plenty to say, but knows the futility of saying it."
>
> "Mr. Beckett is an evangelical zombie, preaching for years to an empty church. Then the word gets out, the church fills to overflowing, and when they hear his sermon he is telling them that they shouldn't listen to preachers."
>
> "....A very hard thing to accept."
>
> "Especially if you're Irish."
>
> "It's a useful appellation."
>
> "Do you think of Mr. Beckett as Irish?"
>
> "He's a Protestant of English blood, educated at Trinity, a cricket player who lives in Paris and writes French. Of course he's Irish."[1]

To think of Beckett as an Irish writer is to be instantly aware that his Irishness is very different from that of writers such as Yeats and Synge, or even, in more precise ways, from that of Joyce. J. C. C. Mays writes of Beckett's "relationship to the traditions he inherits" as involving Beckett in "predicaments of national and personal identity" ("Mythologised Presences" 202-03). While Beckett has obviously and consistently repudiated any literary concern with Irish history or culture, he has not escaped what Richard Kearney calls the "specifically Irish experiences of exile, marginality and dissent" ("The Demythologising Intellect" 293). Thus, Harrington's claim that Beckett's rejection of Irish culture as a milieu for his writings does not mean that these writings are not "consistently grounded" in the "*Irish* cultural predicament" remains valid (191). If we concede that Beckett's writings have been a long rejection of his native land, that rejection itself implies relationship.

However we define Beckett's Irishness, his connection with the Irish literary tradition is much more firmly established today than it was twenty years ago. Nonetheless, this link will almost certainly never develop into an enclosing of Beckett within the tradition. Three reasons for this claim are: Beckett's origins, in regard to early upbringing, religion, and education are Anglo-Irish rather than Gaelic; his extended absence from Ireland as homeland is deliberate and biographically definitive; and his adoption of French as the language of his writings situates him in a larger European or continental tradition of literature. But to refuse to enclose Beckett within the Irish tradition by no means negates the strong influence of this literary tradition on his work.

There are at least four ways to consider Beckett's literary relationship to Ireland. One is his unique use of the Gaelic literary

heritage so exploited in diferent ways by writers such as W. B. Yeats, John Synge, and James Joyce. The scholar who has pioneered in linking Beckett with the Gaelic literary heritage is Vivian Mercier. In *The Irish Comic Traditions,* Mercier describes Beckett's extensive shaping of his characters on the "grotesque-macabre" human sexual patterns abounding in the illustrations, carvings, and rituals of early Gaelic myth and folklore (47-77). In her article on Beckett in *Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett: New Light on Three Modern Irish Writers,* Sighle Kennedy refines and extends Mercier's observations, identifying Beckett's painstaking translation of part of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* into French as the source of Beckett's knowledge of the Gaelic literary tradition, and placing Beckett's use of this tradition more deeply in the thematics of the writings (154-57).

A second element of Beckett's literary Irishness is what Colgan describes as the particular suitability of the Irish voice to Beckett's drama. "The Irish voice has a special quality in his plays....Beckett's voice and rhythm suits Irish readers. When he wrote plays, he wrote in a certain rhythm, which is very Hiberno-English." Alan Stanford, who acted the role of Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* in the Dublin Festival agrees with Colgan: "In Ireland it is fascinating to see Beckett done in his native dialect. Gogo and Didi [Estragon and Vladimir of *Waiting for Godot*] belong to Ireland and very much of their speech fits in naturally here. It is very Irish, you can hear their conversations in any pub in Ireland" (O'Halloran 4). One can only wonder what Beckett would think on hearing his stripped, deliberately non-English language in this play described so gleefully as Anglo-Irish. But Colgan and Stanford are not alone in their observations; a consensus of similar response has developed.

A third element of Beckettian literary Irishness has to do with metaphysical grounding, a grounding which Hugh Kenner describes as a "crucial" escaping of "humanist dogma" by certain great Irish writers—he names Swift and Beckett—who have thereby become the "persistent reformers of the fictional imagination" (69). Because this element transcends content (Gaelic influence) and style (affinity to the Irish voice) to involve itself with Beckett's metaphysics, it is indeed "crucial." It remains provocative, however, in Kenner's discourse because he does not explain what he means by claiming that Beckett escapes humanist dogma in the tradition of Swift.

In his chapter on Beckett in *The Irish Mind,* Kearney illuminates what might be certain aspects of Kenner's claim. Beckett's people are separated from the bright promises of the Enlightenment proceeding

from Descartes' bold epistemology. Mind cannot connect functionally with matter, much less control it. Mind cannot implement the desires of the body nor gain freedom from physical demands. And the mind—or self—has no autonomous existence: it does not exist by virtue of its thought processes. Instead, in Beckett's world, in order to be, one must be perceived. Thus Beckett agrees with the Irish Berkeley: "*Esse est percipi aut percipere* ("The Demythologising Intellect" 270-77). Beckett's characters, then, are not the human world-knowers and world-movers envisioned by Bacon, Newton, and their heirs. Instead, the Beckettian character is typically guilt-ridden, unable to effect much of anything, and at odds with and victimized by his environment. Unlike the existentialist heroes—those last determiners of their own destinies—Beckett's people are reduced to a perplexed waiting for help from a transcendent source that never materializes.

Kearney explains further that Beckett's "demythologization of enlightenment idealism" does not fit comfortable and rationalist ideas about divinity proceeding from deistic Enlightenment premises. Questions about God's existence or non-existence escape the boundaries of any appeal to reason or logic in Beckett's milieu. Furthermore, God is not situated either at some happy observational vantage point or as a cozy component of human consciousness. Instead, Beckett's deity exists (if he exists at all) in an "insurmountable" separation from humans, who are trapped in "fallibility and fallenness" ("The Demythologizing Intellect" 278). Kearney speculates that Beckett's "non-believing belief" or "agnosticism" allows for the *via negativa* as a possible "way to encounter an incomprehensible God." But such encounter remains only a possibility. Is Beckett's transcendent voice "simply nihilistic nonsense" or the speaking of the "hidden God"? Kearney concludes that it is impossible to tell ("The Demythologizing Intellect" 279, 281, 287). At any rate, Beckett's God escapes descriptions that have proliferated in Western thought since the Enlightenment.[2]

When Mays defines Beckett as Irish because of his place in a centuries-old, Anglo-Irish tradition, I think that he is describing a second component in what Kenner refers to as Beckett's removal from humanist dogma. Based on emotions "compounded of dependence and renunciation," Beckett's writing stance demonstrates itself as a detachment from the art form being employed, an isolation from the comforts of community, a display of cruelty attended at once by "tenderness, bitterness, and violence," a rage against problems of identity, and a "vision of life as purgatorial." From such a stance, writers from the "beginnings of the Irish contribution to writing in

English" have infused their works with a certain nonsentimentality about life that is consistently different from optimistic, progressive, authorial viewpoints based on modern humanistic assumptions ("Beckett's Irish Roots" 29-33).

A third and obvious component of Beckett's removal from humanist dogma is a non-involvement in the life of the flesh evidenced by the creation of physically deteriorating characters, by a repulsiveness assigned to sexuality, and by numerous scatological references. Kearney links Beckett with Swift in a common recoiling "in horror from this decadent world of mortals" ("The Demythologising Intellect" 280).

The following aspects of Beckett's literary Irishness, then, have been noted in the critical discourse about the writings: the use of Gaelic folklore and myth, the affinity of the Beckettian dramatic voice with Irish intonation and speech rhythms, and Swiftian metaphysics at odds with Enlightenment premises. In the remainder of this essay I wish to focus on a fourth aspect that has thus far escaped critical notice—Beckett's use of landscape in the practice of the Celtic poet. An excellent description of this practice—a practice widely commented on in criticism on Irish literature—occurs in an essay by Keith Sagar on Ted Hughes. Sagar defines Hughes as Celtic rather than Anglo-English by citing Hughes' own emphasis on the shaping power of a childhood spent in a section of England (along the Calder River) that was the last area of the once-Celtic island to be claimed by the Angles. According to Hughes and Sager, this childhood landscape was peculiarly Celtic, thus molding Hughes' poetic identity as a Celtic rather than an English poet. Sagar states, "this landscape was imprinted on his [Hughes'] soul, and, in a sense, all his poems are about it" (4).

Our interest is in Sagar's definitions of the Celtic poet's use of landscape. Not simply "available as subject matter" or as setting, landscape—which "is likely to be...dramatic, insistent, and wild"—emerges as a "fund of vital images" and as a "paradigm for...understanding...life." Furthermore, Sagar continues, this emergence of landscape for the Celtic poet is always "religious" because it expresses the "depths of the human psyche" and connects these depths with the "hidden sources of everything in the non-human world." When landscape appears poetically as images of experience ("paradigms" of "life"), subconscious memories ("depths of the...psyche"), and links with the mysterious in nature ("hidden sources" of the "non-human"), it assumes a demonic or "dark" dimension. Sagar's description of Hughes' Celtic use of landscape defines this darkness as a "struggle" of life over death, healing over wounding, and expression over nothingness (2-3).

By common critical consensus, Beckett's writings in any genre are essentially poetic. We can note that his use of landscape, especially in the fiction, is arrestingly similar to Sagar's definitions of Celtic practice. Beckettian landscapes most often have their source in stored childhood memories deeply embedded in the consciousness of a narrator or character (in "depths of the...psyche"). Only in the earlier fiction are the scenes attached to named geographical areas. In the mature works, the scenes are mythical, everywhere and yet nowhere (imagistic rather than literal). Both as individual images and as collective symbol, they function ironically to create a narrative paradigm of human experience in which Beckett's people quest continually but unsuccessfully for a vanished Eden of order and beauty, a paradise never known except in mythic consciousness. The landscape symbolizes the possibility of a meeting of all human need and desire by some kind of transcendent enactment, but the possibility never materializes. Instead, nature always falls flat on its face. Thus, for Beckett, the Celtic poetic darkness of landscape becomes perpetual non-fulfillment rather than, as for Hughes, overcoming of a struggle.

One example of Beckett's literary assimilation of landscape in the Celtic pattern is his use of the Dublin mountains or hills west of Carrickmines, beyond Dun Laoghaire harbor, with the stone quarries cut out and the gorse fires burning along the slopes. As a boy Beckett hears from his home in Foxrock near Dublin the barking dogs and ringing hammers of the stonecutters who have lived for generations in these mountains. At night he watches from his bedroom window the lights of the intermittently burning gorse flickering from the hillsides (Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* 58). These sounds and sights become permanently associated with the security of a child lying in his own bed in his family's home at night, safe from distant and unfamiliar situations. This repeated experience becomes part of a stock of memories for the writer Beckett.

References to what we recognize as the Dublin mountains with their stonecutters and gorse fires appear in three of Beckett's published fictional works.[3] In no reference to these mountains, however, are they named or identified as any particular geographical area. Beginning in the novel *Watt* and becoming a definitive literary pattern by the time of the French writing of the late 1940s and early 1950s, Beckett's scenes detach themselves from any actual geography and become places in a mythical landscape that exists only in the language of the fiction and in the consciousness of the reader. That is, they become what Sagar calls "vital images" (2). For Beckett, however, the images are not of a

universal country but of a no-country. Existential homelessness becomes the point of origin for a journey inward through vague landscapes that are twilight zones of a no-man's land toward soulscapes of the mind that house not a self but a no-self. When any scene of this no-country becomes recognizably linked with a geographical site, that scene functions ironically to sever the protagonist (and reader) from whatever order, beauty, or security the geographical site should signify. The ironic functioning defines the image as "dark."

As irony, the three references to the Dublin mountains communicate anything but qualities associated with a child's home as haven. Like nearly all of Beckett's literary situations, these three passages describe insecurity, dread, loneliness, and resignation to despair. The reference to the mountains itself, however, is couched in lyrical language suitable to the childhood association of the image. The resulting effect is intensely ironic and resistant to any easy interpretation. Those of us familiar with Beckett's work know that this writer is not contrasting the difficulties of adulthood with the idealism of childhood. For the literary Beckett, childhood is a prelude to the unfulfillment of the rest of life. Nor is he offering the image as a symbol of some yet ungrasped but forthcoming desirable event that a hero or heroine will finally achieve. In Beckett's world the satisfaction of any desire leads merely to new want and unrequited need. Instead, the lyrical image simply lies ironically arranged on the page, contrasting with the bleak paragraphs or sentences of its context. The image points backward to a lost Eden that never existed, but also insists by its very presence some possibility, some "perhaps," that remains undefined and unrealized. As Kearney has said, Beckett's language may not refer to any reality beyond its own textual bleakness but it does not remain satisfied with this impoverishment: it waits for bestowal or completion (*Transitions* 76).

The first use of the image of the Dublin mountains is in Beckett's tight little story "First Love." A first-person account of the life of a man from the day he is evicted from his childhood home to that on which he is banished from his present dwelling by the cries of a newborn baby, the prose is almost unrelieved irony, describing a parody of what might be called a normal life cycle. Beneath the farce, however, exists what is not so much a satire of human love and life as an anguished lament that experience proves them to be as they are. The story defines love as a banishment and the events of human life as a cycle of death.

Early in the story, a single reference is made to mountains that can be seen from the top floor of the house where the narrator and a woman

live (13). This mentioning, however, is not developed as a foreshadowing. We hear nothing more of any objects outside the house. Instead, the objects and persons in the house interact with one another as if in a particularly vicious and nonsensical hell. The hero/narrator specifies:

> From that day forth [the day he learns of the woman's pregnancy] things went from bad to worse, to worse and worse. Not that she neglected me, she could never have neglected me enough, but the way she kept plaguing me with *our* child, exhibiting her belly and breasts and saying it was due any moment, she could feel it pepping [sic] already. (18)

As the man is forced to look at, is given a "clear view" of the woman's developing "rotundities," he sees in his mind's eye other, more scenic rotundities—an image of what we recognize as the Dublin mountains of Beckett's childhood:

> I saw the mountain, impassable, cavernous, secret, where from morning to night I'd hear nothing but the wind, the curlews, the clink like distant silver of the stone-cutters' hammers. I'd come out in the daytime to the heather and gorse, all warmth and scent, and watch at night the distant city lights, if I chose, and the other lights, the lighthouses and lightships my father had named for me, when I was small, and whose names I could find again, in my memory, if I chose, that I knew. (18)

No explanation of or justification for this mental image is offered. But the words remain, echoing in the reader's consciousness as he reads the hero's words which conclude the story:

> As long as I kept walking I didn't hear them [the baby's cries] because of the footsteps. But as soon as I halted I heard them again, a little fainter each time, admittedly, but what does it matter, faint or loud, cry is cry, all that matters is that it should cease. For years I thought they would cease. Now I don't think so any more. (19)

The cries of the baby and the narrator's memory of the mountains of his own childhood persist beyond the closing lines of this text, echoing with possibilities of love and birth (life) that never occur.

The second occurrence of the mountain image is in another of Beckett's *Stories*, "The End." "The End" and its two companion stories—"The Expelled" and "The Calmative"—tell of an exiled hero who longs for a home and who suffers abuse from nearly all the elements that make up his world. Consequently, his responses become those of abuse or loathing, although he yearns for companionship. The espisodes he relates are the result of the fact that words are all he has been given to fill space and time. His body is rotting away and repulsive with sores, disease, and disability. Detached mentally from this body, his mind is also deteriorating—even to a state of uncertainty as to whether he is alive or dead.

In "The End" the protagonist is banished from some place where he has been a ward of charity. He stays for a while in a basement, from which he is evicted also, although he agrees to room with a pig if allowed to stay. Leaving the town, he journeys toward the country, lives for a while in a cave by the sea and then in a cabin in the mountains. Finally reduced to begging, he progresses (mentally and physically) toward death in a shed by a river. The tale ends as he experiences a vision of himself (which may be what actually happens) floating out to sea in a boat. He removes the plug to allow the boat to sink, takes the sedative from the phial (received in "The Calmative"), and dies, or rather explodes into the sky and sea.

Because mountains are part of the actual landscape of this story, the occurrence of the mountain image here is more continuous and expected than that in "First Love." Another reason for this continuity and expectation is that the tone of "The End," while as bleak as that of "First Love," is not as ironic and bitter. Instead, its tone is one of confusion, bewilderment, and pain.

The hero sees mountains fitting the image of the Dublin mountains as he lies in the boat floating out to sea:

> Now the sea air was all about me, I had no other shelter than the land, and what does it amount to, the shelter of the land, at such a time. I saw the beacons, four in all, including a lightship. I knew them well. It was evening, I was with my father on a height, he held my hand. I would have liked him to draw me close with a gesture of protective love, but his mind was on other things. He also taught me the names of the mountains. But to have done with these visions I also saw the lights of the buoys, the sea seemed full of them, red and green and to my surprise even yellow. And on the slopes of the mountain, now rearing its unbroken bulk behind the

> town, the fires turned from gold to red, from red to gold. I knew what it was, it was the gorse burning. How often I had set a match to it myself, as a child. And hours later, back in my home, before I climbed into bed, I watched from my high window the fires I had lit. That night then, all aglow with distant fires, on sea, on land and in the sky, I drifted with the currents and the tides. (69)

But the lyrical sentences referring to the mountains change nothing in the story. The brief holding of the child's hand and abortive parental communication are submerged in a sea momentarily illuminated with color and light which is nonetheless a sea of death.

The third and last reference to stonecutters or fiery lights on the Dublin mountains in Beckett's fiction is in the second novel of the trilogy, *Malone Dies*. This hero, a bedridden person in a room in some sort of institution, is attempting to write stories to fill the time until he dies. An old woman brings his soup and a chamber-pot daily for awhile, but disappears from the tale. He loses his stick with which he has been maneuvering his few possessions, and some stranger visits him. Other than these happenings, the events of the novel are the contradictory, senseless, tragic, absurd situations that author Malone creates for his three characters—Sapo, Macmann, and Lemuel. Significantly enough, an image of the mountains is included in the "story" of each character.

Malone is tediously spinning the tale of Saps, a dolt of a peasant boy whom his creator cannot propel to enough fictional life to inhabit a narrative. As Malone briefly abandons his protagonist (who is wandering "from light to shadow, from shadow to light, unheedingly" [206]), the would-be writer seems "to have again the hearing of my boyhood." The sound he likes best in this reverie is the "barking of the dogs, at night, in the clusters of hovels up in the hills, where the stone-cutters lived, like generations of stone-cutters before them." Not only does he hear in memory; he also sees:

> From the hills another joy came down, I mean the brief scattered lights that sprang up on their slopes at nightfall, merging in blurs scarcely brighter than the sky, less bright than the stars, and which the palest moon extinguished. (206)

Author Malone eventually completely abandons Sapo, fabricating instead a more active but similarly grotesque character called Macmann. Along with Macmann, Malone brings to fictional life a monstrous

person, Lemuel, who is keeper in the asylum where Macmann is kept. On Easter Day Lemuel takes a party of inmates, including Macmann, on a picnic to an island. While with Macmann on the island, Lemuel watches mountains or hills, which

> raise themselves gently, faintly blue, out of the confused plain. It was there somewhere he was born, in a fine house, of loving parents. Their slopes are covered with ling and furze, its hot yellow bells, better known as gorse. The hammers of the stone-cutters ring all day like bells. (286)

The nostalgic lyricism of this description is weighted with irony. The sadistic Lemuel murders or maims with a hatchet all of the group entrusted to his care, including Macmann, leaving them a "tangle of grey bodies....[s]ilent, dim...in a heap, in the night" (287). And shining over the scene are the "absurd lights, the stars, the beacons, the buoys, the lights of earth and in the hills the faint fires of the blazing gorse" (287). These fires have burned in Lemuel's memory, and in Malone's and Beckett's literary memories. The blood will never dry on Lemuel's hatchet, Malone says (287-88), a hatchet that changes easily into Malone's stick, or the pencil with which he is writing his stories, stories of an Easter celebration that laments the absence of all that the Christian Resurrection implies about human experience (287-88).

We could trace other memories of the Irish landscape through Beckett's fiction, and, if we wished, through his poetry and drama as well. Memories of sheep in pastures, of the sea, of gardens, of lovers in a boat, and of parents holding or rejecting a child's hand. And persistently the memory occurs in the pattern of Celtic poetic use described. For Beckett, such language transcends image, and even symbol, to become symbolic myth, a graphic, lyrical rendering of what we sense to be our birthright but never possess. If Beckett abandons geographical and political/cultural Ireland, he does not abandon his memories of the landscape. Instead, memories of the Irish land, transformed by this writer's unique ironic vision, become the material from which he crafts his art.[4]

NOTES

[1]Harrington quotes this passage from Hanly's novel (98-99) in *The Irish Beckett* (44).

[2]For thorough and comprehensive analyses of the question(s) of God in Beckett's work, especially the fiction, see my book *God, the Quest, the Hero: Thematic Structures in Beckett's Fiction*, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, (Chapel Hill, 1988).

[3]In the chapter on the Dublin mountains in his photographic biography of Beckett, *The Beckett Country*, Eoin O'Brien collects thirty-six references to the mountains in Beckett's poems, drama, and fiction. Three of these are from the passages describing the burning gorse and stonecutters' hammering from "First Love" and "The End" dealt with in this essay. O'Brien does not include in this category of his book the descriptions I discuss of the mountains in *Malone Dies*.

[4]An earlier version of this essay was delivered at the American Conference for Irish Studies, Southern Regional Conference, February, 1991, at Montevallo College, Alabama.

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