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‘Turns Wick Low’:

Samuel Beckett’s Darkening Vision and an Irish County

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Like John Millington Synge, Samuel Beckett was a Protestant writer from south Dublin who was profoundly affected by early and extensive exposure to County Wicklow. As children and young adults, Synge and Beckett both took frequent walks and bicycle rides into the Wicklow Mountains, and both spent summer holidays in villages along the north Wicklow coast. Pleasant early associations meant that both retained a strong attachment to the county for the rest of their lives. Beckett was well aware that he shared this Wicklow connection with Synge; according to Anne Atik, he was a great admirer of Synge’s Wicklow essays, and, even late in life, could remember every line of one of Synge’s poems set in the county (‘Epitaph’).¹

Despite Synge and Beckett’s mutual attachment to Wicklow, there is one striking difference in their literary treatment of it. Whereas the darker side of Wicklow’s frequently treacherous landscape is referenced in all four of Synge’s Wicklow plays (*When the Moon Has Set*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *The Tinker’s Wedding*, and *The Well of the Saints*), the county’s countryside and coast are either unreservedly praised or treated humorously and/or dismissively in Beckett’s early work. It is only later in his career that he gradually allows the malevolence of Wicklow’s boggy uplands and rocky shore to enter his work. As we shall see, the increasing darkness in Beckett’s depictions of Wicklow can be traced to a series of momentous events which occurred in his life between September 1938 and June 1946.

Beckett’s regular walks and bicycle trips into the Wicklow Mountains during his formative years were undertaken in the company of his beloved father, Bill. In a letter to Georges Duthuit from 1948, Beckett says that he has ‘wonderful memories’ of these idyllic journeys through ‘romantic landscape’,² and, accordingly, accounts of these long tramps appear frequently in works from all phases of his career (though often in occluded form, such as in *Texts for Nothing* (1955) and *From an Abandoned Work* (1958)). These jaunts, as well as the family holidays spent in rented

homes in Greystones and Kilcoole, were crucial parts of what Beckett regarded as his ‘happy childhood’.³ Although Beckett was intellectually aware (from his earliest letters) of the ‘secret stealthy’ nature of the ‘bog and mountain scenery’ in north Wicklow, including its mood of ‘calm secret hostility’,⁴ the fact that he became acquainted with the county in the presence of his loving father gave him a sense of security in Wicklow that coloured his depictions of it for years. (Given this lingering sense of security, it is noteworthy that he witnessed the 1916 Rising, including the sight of Dublin in flames, from the distance and safety of the Wicklow Mountains.)

In a letter to Thomas McGreevy in 1931, Beckett recounts a walk from Rathfarnham into north Wicklow, ending in Enniskerry and describes the bittersweet feelings that the both ‘beautiful and *lacinant*’ landscape has on him (*lacinant* being French for ‘throbbing’, ‘stabbing’, ‘obsessive’). Beckett tells McGreevey that this dual-natured landscape, mixed with ‘memories of childhood’, produces ‘a most pleasant & melancholy limpness’ and can even create a ‘*moulin à larmes*’ (or ‘tear mill’).⁵

Clearly, these walks through Wicklow as a young man (evoking – as they did – happy memories of times spent in Wicklow as a child), were soothing and ‘pleasant’ to Beckett at this point in his life – even if a shade melancholic – and explain why, early in his career, his portraits of Wicklow are marked by beautiful descriptive prose, humour, and, occasionally, untroubled dismissiveness.

Dream of Fair to Middling Women (1932)

Wicklow first appears in Beckett’s work in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, his first novel (completed in 1932 but not published until after his death). As Eoin O’Brien has pointed out, the novel’s Silver Strand episode takes place on a well-known beach south of Wicklow Town.⁶ In this episode, the narrator at first claims that the comical courtship scene between Belacqua and the Alba is taking place at the Silver Strand; however, he later corrects this: ‘looking back through our notes we are aghast to find that’ the rendezvous actually took place at ‘Jack’s Hole’.⁷ Jack’s Hole is a small cove further down the Wicklow coast from the Silver Strand, which (as O’Brien notes) is ‘closer to the popular resort of Brittas Bay’.⁸ In the novel, the narrator changed the location because a place called Jack’s Hole ‘would be quite out of place in what threatens to come down a love passage’.⁹

Given that Beckett would refer to the ‘calm secret hostility’ of north Wicklow only a few months after sending this novel off to London publishers, it is interesting that he writes here that

Jack's Hole is 'not ... by any manner of means definitely *hostile* as atmosphere and scape to the Olympian romance that may break over it now at any moment'.¹⁰ In line with his habit of praising the Wicklow landscape early in his career and not dwelling on its darker side, Beckett says that Jack's Hole is, in fact:

As nice a site as any in the country ... [W]ithout being the Bride of the Adriatic or anything of that kind and in spite of its leaving a few trees to be desired, [it] furnished as neat a natural comment on the ephemeral sophism as any to be had in the Free State. Which is saying the hell of a lot.¹¹

Given the Wicklow setting and the fact that Beckett first purchased Synge's Wicklow essays in 1926,¹² there could be a tacit defence of Synge – and the Celtic Twilight – later in this scene (despite Beckett's distancing of himself from the Irish Literary Revival in the 1934 essay 'Recent Irish Poetry'). The Alba 'sneer[s]':

in this festering country ... haven't we had enough Deirdreeing of Hobson's weirds and Kawthleens in the gloaming hissing up petticoats of sororrhoea? ... The mist ... an' it rollin' home UP the glen and the mist agin an' it rollin' home DOWN the glen. Up, down, hans arown ... Merde. Give me noon. Give me Racine.¹³

With what is described as 'a betrayal of annoyance', Beckett's alter-ego, Belacqua, replies: 'Help yourself ... but Racine is all twilight.'¹⁴

Elsewhere in *Dream*, the Smelderina curiously refers to her reproductive organ as her 'Wicklow twingle-twangler',¹⁵ and the novel closes with Beckett mentioning, as he would so often during his career, that it is possible to see the hills and mountains of Wales from elevations in Wicklow such as Djouce Mountain and the Sugarloaf.¹⁶ These brief references to Wicklow aside, however, it is in the Silver Strand episode that we get the best feel for Beckett's tendency to treat the Garden County as benign in his early work.

***More Pricks than Kicks* (1934)**

Dream of Fair to Middling Women failed to find a publisher, so Beckett cannibalised it and wrote a few new stories in order to create the short story collection, *More Pricks than Kicks* (published in 1934). County Wicklow is first mentioned in the second story, 'Fingal', set in north County Dublin. Belacqua, looking out over Fingal, says to Winnie that it's 'a magical land ... a champaign land for the sad and serious, not a bloody little toy Kindergarten like Wicklow'.¹⁷ It is true that parts of north

Wicklow are more manicured and garden-like than most places in Ireland, but this passage is noteworthy, because this sentiment regarding Wicklow is not undercut by the text (even if Belacqua's pompousness in this scene is). As a result, the reader could come away with the impression that Beckett does in fact regard Wicklow as 'cutesy' and harmless.

In this light, it is interesting that, in a story that makes much of Belacqua's sensitivity to his surroundings (if not his sensitivity to people), Beckett hides his *true* feelings about Wicklow's garden-like character. In a letter to McGreevy from 1932, he writes: 'I disagree with you about ... [Wicklow's] gardenish landscape. The lowest mountain here terrifies me far more than anything I saw in Connemara or Achill. Or is it that a garden is more frightening than a waste?'¹⁸ Beckett's fondness for Wicklow, his lingering sense of security there, and his soothing enjoyment of the dual beautiful/hostile nature of its landscape were still preventing him from depicting it as a 'terrifying' place in his work, whatever he felt privately.

The second story in *More Pricks than Kicks* to mention Wicklow is 'Love and Lethe', in which Belacqua and Ruby scale Tibbradden Mountain in south County Dublin to carry out a suicide pact. While on top of the mountain, Belacqua sees the neighbouring Glendoo Mountain, in Rathfarnham (Synge's Dublin birthplace); he thinks 'of Synge and recover[s] his spirits'.¹⁹ In this scene, Belacqua is in a very specific mood, only interested in taking in this one part of south Dublin. We are told that he is not interested in the city of Dublin itself or 'the plains to the north'; likewise, 'Wicklow, full of breasts with pimples, he refused to consider.'²⁰ Eoin O'Brien, in *The Beckett Country*, has shown a photograph of the part of County Wickow visible from Tibbradden Mountain, and it does indeed resemble 'breasts with pimples'.²¹ This dismissive, Swiftian remark underscores that, in *More Pricks than Kicks*, Wicklow is still being depicted as non-threatening.

In the *More Pricks* story 'Draff', the Redford Protestant Cemetery in Greystones, where Beckett's father was buried in 1933, is described but not named; it would be described but not named again in the novella 'First Love' (written in 1946). Although this cemetery will be discussed later in reference to the work in which it is specifically named – the 'Kilcool' manuscript from 1963 – here it is sufficient to point out that in 'Draff' and 'First Love', this cemetery is not a scary or gothic place. In 'Draff', it is described as 'the loveliest little lap of earth you ever saw', and, as the groundsman observes its beauty, he decides that the moonlight shining on the gravestones in this plot by the sea makes 'a classico-romantic scene'.²² In 'First Love', Redford is similarly regarded as a harmless place (the narrator claims that it is too small, and makes jokes about widows and the inscriptions on the tombstones).²³

Mercier and Camier (1946)

After *More Pricks than Kicks*, the next work by Beckett to specifically describe and discuss places in Wicklow is *Mercier and Camier* (written in the summer of 1946). Works written in between only make passing reference to Wicklow: Bray is mentioned once in *Murphy* (from 1938) and the stonecutters who work near Prince William's Seat in Glencree are alluded to in *Watt* (which was written during the war).²⁴ (The sound of these stonecutters is mentioned again in 'First Love' and *Malone Dies* (1951), but Glencree and Wicklow are not specifically named.)²⁵

In *Mercier and Camier*, Beckett gives several indications that the moorland where the titular characters are wandering is north Wicklow: they encounter a memorial to the murdered Nationalist, Noel Lemass, at Glencree, and we are told in the French version of the novel that the road where they are walking is '*l'ancien chemin des armées*'²⁶ – the Old Military Road, which runs through the Sally Gap and which was built by the British Army in the wake of the 1798 Rebellion to make it easier to hunt Irish rebels. In Beckett's description of the landscape around the Old Military Road, he attempts – for the first time in his fiction – to capture the more treacherous aspects of Wicklow's topography.

However, he does so in prose of such beauty that he arguably fails to convey how truly desolate the area is (Eoin O'Brien rightly calls it 'a lonesome and at times eerie spot').²⁷ Beckett writes:

A road still carriageable climbs over the high moorland. It cuts across vast turfbogs, a thousand feet above sea-level, two thousand if you prefer. It leads to nothing any more. A few ruined forts, a few ruined dwellings. The sea is not far, just visible beyond the valleys dipping eastward, pale plinth as pale as the pale wall of sky. Tarns lie hidden in the folds of the moor, invisible from the road, reached by faint paths, under high over-hanging crags. All seems flat, or gently undulating, and there at a stone's throw these high crags, all unsuspected by the wayfarer. Of granite what is more. In the west the chain is at its highest, its peaks exalt even the most downcast eyes, peaks commanding the vast champaign land, the celebrated pastures, the golden vale. Before the travellers, as far as eye can reach, the road winds on into the south, uphill, but imperceptibly. None ever pass this way but beauty-spot hogs and fanatical trampers. Under its heather mask the quag allures, with an allurements not all mortals can rest. Then it swallows them up or the mist comes down. The city is not far either, from certain points its lights can be seen by night, its light rather, and by day its haze. Even the piers of the harbour can be distinguished, on very clear

days, of the two harbours, tiny arms in the glassy sea outflung, known flat, seen raised. And the islands and promontories, one has only to stop and turn at the right place, and of course by night the beacon lights, both flashing and revolving. It is here one would lie down. In a hollow bedded with dry heather, and fall asleep, for the last time, on an afternoon, in the sun, head down among the minute life of stems and bells, and fast fall asleep, fast farewell to charming things. It's a birdless sky, the odd raptor, no song. End of descriptive passage.²⁸

The danger of the quagmire and the fright that can accompany a quickly descending mist are passed over in two sentences, whereas the beauty of the area and the view from it are dwelt upon at length. This beauty is even further emphasised when Mercier and Camier, after taking in the area and its view, agree that this 'bog [is] ... most beautiful'.²⁹

The passage describing Noel Lemass's murder and his memorial (with its flippant and dismissive tone) downplays the terror involved in his abduction and killing, and deftly avoids dwelling on the image of Lemass's mutilated body being found in such a desolate location. The casual reader could therefore come away without much of a sense of the gothic nature of the relatively recent events to which the men are referring. It takes a discerning critic such as Seán Kennedy to recognise that 'aspects of [the] passage' about Lemass and his memorial are 'deliberately disingenuous', especially the fact that Mercier and Camier cannot exactly remember Lemass's name or the details of his murder. Beckett is suggesting that Mercier and Camier are trying to forget violent, momentous incidents from Ireland's turbulent recent past; however, the two men are unable to escape the imprint that such history has left upon them. As Kennedy argues, Mercier and Camier's 'rationalisation of their murder' of a Civic Guard demonstrates that 'they are still ensnared in a story they purport to have forgotten and excuse their own violence as a just response to the violent political context in which they move.'³⁰

Beckett, in *Mercier and Camier*, is starting to allow darkness into his depictions of Wicklow, but, by keeping the Free State political subtext around Lemass's murder somewhat shrouded, and by only briefly touching on the eeriness of the landscape around Glencree, he is clearly remaining loyal to his early pleasant associations with the county.³¹

Krapp's Last Tape (1958)

The next Beckett work to specifically mention a location in Wicklow is the play *Krapp's Last Tape* from 1958. As with *Mercier and Camier*, the depiction of Wicklow is a mix of light and dark. Krapp

is thinking of going to bed and dwelling on pleasant memories as he drifts off to sleep. He claims that, if he does this, he will, in his mind, 'be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells.'³² This passage is clearly based on Beckett's own memories of walking on Croghan Mountain in Wicklow with his Kerry Blue terrier. However, whereas such memories of Wicklow were previously presented as pleasant to dwell upon in Beckett's early work, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the protagonist goes on to dismiss the memories of walks on Croghan and of childhood Christmases as part of 'all that old misery'.³³ As Krapp and Beckett get older and life gets harder, these memories of younger, happier times are increasingly painful to recall.

'Kilcool' (1963)

The painfulness of recalling younger days in Wicklow is central to Beckett's next work to specifically mention a location in the Garden County. In the 'Kilcool'³⁴ [*sic*] manuscript from 1963 (an early version of what would eventually become *Not I* (1972) and arguably *That Time* (1976)), Beckett has a lone woman – speaking of herself in the third person and with her face illuminated by a spotlight – recall the time when her parents died and she was sent to live with her aunt, a childless widow, in an old ramshackle house in Kilcoole. In the first draft of 'Kilcool' (the only one to specifically mention places in Wicklow), the woman is alone and dying, and she cries and pants and grins, as she recalls – and is tortured by – her memories of younger days. Beckett's family rented a house for the summer in the coastal village of Kilcoole when he was a child, and the woman's memories are clearly based on Beckett's own light and dark memories of the Wicklow coast. Wicklow's liminal quality of being not quite urban and not quite rural is invoked when the woman refers to the dark roads that lead to Dublin and to the Dubliners who come out to the seaside town on trains.

The first draft ends poignantly, as the woman remembers her fateful train journey out to live with her aunt. She says that, at the time, the world seemed full of possibility. She remembers gazing out of the train at the beautiful Irish Sea, passing picturesque Dun Laoghaire pier, and going through the tunnel at Bray Head. She recalls that, at the end of her journey, she met her aunt who took her by the hand and reassured her that they would be happy living together. This is heartbreaking since we know that the orphaned woman is now dying alone and is praying for God, the giver of light, to take away the light and these torturing memories.³⁵

A Piece of Monologue (1979)

The woman in 'Kilcool' is alone, because, long ago, her aunt died young and was buried in a cemetery called Redford, located by the sea. The image of a lonely, older person living in Wicklow, tortured by the past and recalling the burial of a loved one in the Redford Protestant Cemetery, recurs in Beckett's last work to specifically mention Wicklow: the play *A Piece of Monologue* from 1979. Although there are no place names *per se* in the work, the speaker, who is alone in his cottage, repeatedly fidgets with a kerosene lamp, and, from time to time, he (in his own words) 'turns wick low'.³⁶ This is a verbal indication that the scene is set in Wicklow; this is backed up by many of the other descriptions in the piece. As Fletcher and Fletcher have argued, the graveyard where the speaker attended the funerals of (presumably) his parents is based on Redford.³⁷ The pelting rain, the grey light, and Beckett's 'beloved' larches – which, as O'Brien has pointed out, grow in great numbers in the Wicklow valleys and not just near his childhood home of Cooldrinagh³⁸ – all indicate that we are in County Wicklow. (Synge, in fact, describes the county's distinctive larches in one of his Wicklow essays).³⁹ The psychic atmosphere in *A Piece of Monologue* is even more desolate, lonely, and loveless than in 'Kilcool'; the darkness that has been growing in Beckett's depictions of Wicklow has now increased immeasurably.

Growing desolation and gathering darkness

Besides finding happy childhood memories painful as he got older, what other events or evolutions occurred in Beckett's life that led him to increasingly incorporate the desolateness and hostility of the Wicklow landscape into his work – a desolateness and hostility that his letters suggest he had always been aware of?

In October 1937, Beckett's mother finally moved out of Cooldrinagh, four years after the death of her husband. Although she bought another, smaller house in Foxrock, which she called New Place, she began spending significant amounts of time in a rented home in Greystones, which (morbidly) overlooked the Redford Protestant Cemetery. On Beckett's lengthy stays with his mother in 1938 and 1939, he (in Deirdre Bair's words) witnessed 'his lonely mother in the tiny cold house with the roiling Irish Sea on one side and desolate Redford Cemetery on the other'.⁴⁰ This broke Beckett's heart, and made him feel guilty about going back to Paris. Ongoing interpersonal difficulties with his mother, however, and (after the outbreak of war) his distaste for Irish neutrality, caused him to prefer 'France in war to Ireland in peace'.⁴¹ Seeing his mother in the lonely house in Greystones was the first experience that contributed to the change in his depictions of Wicklow. In

two subsequent works ('Kilcool' and *A Piece of Monologue*), he would depict a lonely, grieving older person struggling to stay sane in north Wicklow. An indication of how much this time with his mother in Greystones affected Beckett is a letter sent to Arland Ussher in December 1938, in which Beckett, who was usually so complimentary about the Wicklow landscape (even when acknowledging its darker elements), refers to the north Wicklow coast as simply 'this *côte de misère*' ('coast of misery'). Likewise, with even more venom than usual, he refers to Ireland as 'the land of my unsuccessful abortion'.⁴²

The general darkening of Beckett's vision, which resulted from witnessing atrocities in Nazi-occupied France, were clearly the second factor which led to his abandonment of essentially harmless or merely bucolic landscapes in his work. As Gerry Dukes has succinctly put it, 'Beckett's wartime experiences of exile and homelessness, of hunger, of hardship and destitution, of destruction and devastation, were to inform nearly all the works he was subsequently to write.'⁴³

The third and final experience was Beckett's famous 'revelation' by or on an Irish pier in 1946, in which he chose to embrace 'the dark I have struggled to keep at bay [but which] is in reality my most valuable' ally – as he put it in an early draft of the semi-autobiographical *Krapp's Last Tape*.⁴⁴ In *The Beckett Country*, O'Brien goes to great lengths to show that the pier being described in *Krapp's Last Tape* is Dun Laoghaire's east pier. While his case is convincing (and that is clearly the pier being described), Beckett mischievously confessed to O'Brien after *The Beckett Country* was published that, in reality, the revelation took place in his mother's rented house as he looked out on Greystones pier.⁴⁵ After this revelation, Greystones was forever linked in Beckett's mind with a conscious embracing of the darkness – a change which certainly contributed to his willingness to start acknowledging the 'hostile' side of Wicklow in his work, and, indeed, to 'turn wick low'.

NOTES

¹ Anne Atik, *How It Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2006), pp.117-119. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Irish Research Council during my research for this article.

² Samuel Beckett. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 2:1941-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck), p.87.

³ As quoted in Christopher Murray, ‘Introduction: “panting on to a hundred”’, in *Samuel Beckett 100 Years: Centenary Essays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2006, ed. Christopher Murray), p.2.

⁴ Samuel Beckett. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 1: 1929-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, eds. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck), pp.127; 127; 136.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.93.

⁶ Eoin O’Brien, *The Beckett Country* (Dublin: The Black Cat Press, 1986), p.107.

⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (Dublin: The Black Cat Press, 1992), p.189.

⁸ O’Brien, *The Beckett Country*, p.107.

⁹ Beckett, *Dream*, p.189.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.189 (emphasis mine).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹² Atik, *How It Was*, p.118.

¹³ Beckett, *Dream*, p.197.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.197. It should be noted that, during this scene, the Alba ‘rummage[s] in her fathomless bag’ (p.187), and O’Brien therefore links the cove of Jack’s Hole to the setting of *Happy Days*, in which Winnie – who is buried deep in sand – memorably examines her handbag’s contents (O’Brien, *The Beckett Country*, pp.106-107). In this essay, however, I will be principally concerned with works in which Wicklow place names and settings are specifically indicated.

¹⁵ Beckett, *Dream*, p.83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.240. A narrowly-Nationalist critic such as Seamus Deane would presumably see this fixation as evidence of Beckett being afflicted by the ‘pathology of literary Unionism’ (Seamus Deane, *Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea* [Field Day Pamphlet, No. 4] (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1984), p.10.)

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (London: John Calder, 1993), p.26.

¹⁸ Beckett, *Letters I*, p.136.

¹⁹ Beckett, *More Pricks*, p.100.

²⁰ Ibid., p.100.

²¹ O'Brien, *The Beckett Country*, p.73.

²² Beckett, *More Pricks*, pp.195; 204.

²³ Samuel Beckett, *First Love and Other Novellas* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp.64-66.

²⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: Picador, 1973), p.38; *Watt* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), p.13.

²⁵ Beckett, *First Love*, p.84; Samuel Beckett, *Trilogy: Molly / Malone Dies / The Unnamable* (London: John Calder, 2003), p.288.

²⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Mercier et Camier* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970), p.165.

²⁷ O'Brien, *The Beckett Country*, p.63.

²⁸ Beckett, *Mercier and Camier* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1974), pp.97-98.

²⁹ Ibid., p.99.

³⁰ Seán Kennedy, 'Cultural Memory in *Mercier and Camier*: The Fate of Noel Lemass', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 15 (2005): 123; 123; 126; 126.

³¹ Incidentally, both Eoin O'Brien and Anthony Cronin have suggested that the area around Glencree, with its occasional lone trees, is the landscape that Beckett may have had in mind when writing *Waiting for Godot*. (See O'Brien, *The Beckett Country*, pp.68-69; Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Flamingo/HarperCollins, 1997), photo caption between p.294 and p.295.) This idea is, of course, debatable.

³² Samuel Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p.63.

³³ Ibid., p.63.

³⁴ Beckett misspells the village's name in the title of the manuscript, but spells it correctly (Kilcoole) in the body of the work. The complete 'Kilcool' manuscript can be found among the Samuel Beckett papers housed at Trinity College Dublin. See TCD MF 176.4664.

³⁵ When writing *Not I* in 1972, Beckett revisited the idea of a spotlight, old, orphaned woman speaking of herself in the third person, trying to shake off poignant and painful memories while wrestling with her God. However, in *Not I*, Beckett moved the action from north Wicklow to the area around

Foxrock, as that play's reference to 'Croker's Acres' indicates. (Beckett, *Shorter Plays*, p.220) Despite this topographical change, the old woman's voice – which Beckett insisted was an Irish voice – remained intact. As Beckett explained to Deirdre Bair: 'I knew that woman in Ireland ... I knew who she was – not "she" specifically, one single woman, but there were so many of those old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, behind the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And I heard "her" saying what I wrote in *Not I*. I actually heard it.' (As quoted in Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Vintage, 2002), p.662.)

³⁶ Beckett, *Shorter Plays*, pp.266, 267.

³⁷ Beryl S. Fletcher and John Fletcher, *A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), p.242.

³⁸ O'Brien, *The Beckett Country*, p.57.

³⁹ J.M. Synge, 'The Oppression of the Hills', in *Travelling Ireland: Essays, 1898-1908* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2009, ed. Nicholas Grene), p.36.

⁴⁰ Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p.315.

⁴¹ As quoted in Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters', *New York Times*, 6 May 1956.

⁴² Beckett, *Letters I*, pp.648; 647.

⁴³ Gerry Dukes, *Samuel Beckett* [Penguin Illustrated Lives Series] (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p.78. For more on the way in which Beckett's vision grew darker as a result of the terrible things he witnessed in France during World War II, see Martin Harries, 'Beckett's Ghost Light', in *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture* (New York and London: Continuum, 2010, eds. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren), pp.19-33.

⁴⁴As quoted in O'Brien, *The Beckett Country*, p.83. It should be noted that in the final published version of the play, Beckett cuts the line off at 'my most–', and, while the early draft cited in this essay has 'valuable' for the next word, Beckett told James Knowlson that the rest of the unheard line is 'precious ally'. (As quoted James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p.319.)

⁴⁵ Eoin O'Brien, 'Keynote Address: "The Annihilation of Reality – The Beckett Country"', *Beckett and the 'State' of Ireland Conference* (University College Dublin, 8 July 2011).