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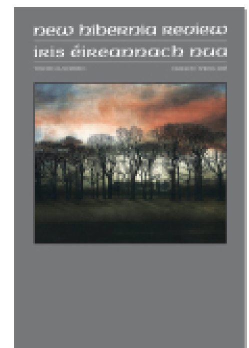

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New Hibernia Review, Volume 22, Number 1, Spring/Earrach 2018, pp. 102-119 (Article)

Published by Center for Irish Studies at the University of St. Thomas

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2018.0007

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Anglo-Irish "Distortion": Double Exposure in Francis Bacon's Portraits and Beckett's *The Old Tune*

Many critics—most notably Michael Billington, James Knowlson, Jane Alison Hale, Erik Tonning, and Peter Fifield—have discussed the painter Francis Bacon's probable influence on the visual images in Samuel Beckett's work for the stage, particularly the disembodied mouth in the 1972 play *Not I*.[1] This, however, is not the only way in which the work of these two artists is connected. Both men, each from an Anglican family residing in Leinster, shared an interest in depicting their exile from Ireland by superimposing two images on top of one another in their work.[2] Bacon depicted the "fragmentation of self" that results from exile by superimposing two faces on one another in his portraits.[3] "Distortion, or contortion, in Bacon's pictures sometimes occurs by his superimposing one image on another," and the resulting obscured faces, especially those in his

1. See: Michael Billington, *One Night Stand: A Critic's View of Modern British Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002), 23; James Knowlson, *Images of Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 83; Jane Alison Hale, "The Impossible Art of Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 111 (1988), 268–74; Erik Tonning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama: Works for Stage and Screen 1962–1985* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 120; Peter Fifield, "Gaping Mouths and Bulging Bodies: Beckett and Francis Bacon," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 1–2 (September, 2009), 57–71. In this essay, the dates used for Beckett's work—with two exceptions—refer to either the first publication or the first production, whichever came first. Exceptions are the *Four Novellas* (*First Love*, *The Expelled*, *The Calmative*, and *The End*) and *Mercier and Camier*; for these, I have given the date of composition, as their publication occurred up to twenty-four years after they were written.
2. In using the term "exile," I am fully aware that Beckett's "exile" was self-chosen, as he could have remained in Ireland as a lecturer at Trinity College Dublin. Like Joyce, however, he felt that he needed "silence, exile and cunning" to accomplish all that he wanted to artistically. Bacon's "exile" was more extreme than Beckett's and was essentially involuntary, as he was banished from his Irish home by a father who disapproved of his sexual orientation. In choosing to refer to Beckett, Bacon, and others as "exiles" in this essay, I am using the term to refer to people who felt that they had to leave Ireland, whether due to external pressure or to pursue personal ambitions that they felt would have remained unfulfilled in Ireland.
3. Steven Leuthold, "Light, Colour, Interiority and the Aesthetics of Enchantment," in *Analecta Husserliana, vol. 65: The Aesthetics of Enchantment in the Fine Arts*, ed. Marlies Kronegger and Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 75.

celebrated self-portraits, evoke the idea that an exile is "distorted" by residing outside the country in which he or she was born and raised.[4] In Beckett's case, he depicted the psychological "distortion" engendered by geographical exile by superimposing places he lived as an adult on the greater Dublin of his youth. In the *Four Novellas* (written in 1946), Beckett performs, as Gerry Dukes has pointed out, "a kind of double exposure or montage in which he superimposes Paris and the river Seine on Dublin and the river Liffey."[5] Likewise, Scott Eric Hamilton has demonstrated that Beckett set the novel *Murphy* (1938) in a part of London laid out much like Dublin (even down to the repetition of certain placenames) to signify the confusion of the exile who, in many ways, resides in two places at once.[6] Beckett also superimposes an English town or suburb on the Dublin suburbs in his 1960 radio play *The Old Tune*.

The expressionist painter Francis Bacon was born on Dublin's south side in 1909. His mother was born in England but had Irish family connections; his Australian-born, English-raised father was a former British army officer who dealt in horses and was a strict disciplinarian. The family moved in the circles of the Irish gentry, and Bacon was raised in Big Houses in County Kildare (Cannycourt in Kilcullen and Straffan Court near Naas) and County Laois (Farmleigh in Abbeyleix, which originally belonged to Bacon's maternal grandmother before it was purchased by his father). Around the time of his seventeenth birthday, Bacon was banished from his family home after his father discovered him modeling his mother's underwear in front of a large mirror. The young man moved to London, where he spent most of his adult life (though he spent two years in Berlin and Paris in the late 1920s).[7]

Bacon's conflicted relationship with his Irish identity is evident from his frequent evasiveness on the subject. He would occasionally insist that he was not in any significant way Irish, and he actually suffered panic attacks whenever he attempted to fly back to his native country.[8] That said, Bacon would also regularly tell interviewers that it was important to remember that he was born and raised in Ireland when considering certain aspects of his work.[9] Even more

4. *"Entry on Francis Bacon," Current Biography Yearbook: 1985*, ed. Charles Moritz (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1986), 16.

5. Gerry Dukes, "Introduction," in Samuel Beckett, *First Love and Other Novellas* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 3.

6. Scott Hamilton, "Beckett, Exile, Politics, and 1930s Dublin," *Emerging Perspectives* 1, 1 (Autumn, 2010), 36–37.

7. Although Beckett and Bacon never met, they were both living in Paris in late 1928.

8. Caroline Blackwood, "Francis Bacon (1908–1992)," *New York Review of Books*, 24 September 1992.

9. See, for example, Richard Cork, "Home Thoughts from an Incurable Surrealist," *The Times (Saturday Review)*, 16 March 1991; Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (London: Constable, 2008), 16–20.

significant, throughout Bacon's career, he fostered an image of himself as "the untutored lad, coming straight from the wilds of Ireland to produce a body of inexplicable, haunting images."[10] A notable example of this occurred before his first retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London in 1962; he explained to Sir John Rothenstein, the director of the Tate, that "I had no upbringing at all . . . I used simply to work on my father's farm near Dublin. I read almost nothing as a child—as for pictures, I was hardly aware they existed."[11]

Bacon's sense of his own Irish identity can be seen from the fact that he "would always speak with affection and admiration about Ireland and the Irish," that he had a great love of Irish writers (Joyce and Yeats, for example, but also the work of such contemporary writers as his friend Caroline Blackwood), and that he "hated . . . British [political] hypocrisy" as it manifested itself in the nation's colonial misadventures. Indeed, according to his friend and biographer Daniel Farson, Bacon believed "that the English had been saved by the Irish and the Scots . . . [and] that it was the Celts that made Britain great."[12] Bacon's relative lack of respect for the British monarchy might also be considered an Irish aspect of his personality. He once booed Princess Margaret at a house party because she was singing badly, which appalled the English guests, but fascinated the proud Irishwoman Blackwood, who later wrote,

> I can think of no one else who would have dared to boo a member of the Royal family in a private house. Among all the guests assembled in Lady Rothermere's ballroom, more than a few were secretly suffering from Princess Margaret's singing, but they suffered in silence, gagged by their snobbery. Francis could not be gagged. If he found a performance shoddy no conventional trepidation prevented him from expressing his reactions.[13]

Even if Bacon may not have always owned his Irish identity, he always recognized that his Irish upbringing was central to his work; he told Peppiatt on several occasions that he thought "artists stay much closer to their childhood than other people."[14] Bacon traced the violence in his work back to the horrors he

10. Peppiatt, 19.

11. Quoted in Peppiatt, 19.

12. Peppiatt, 4; Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 14. For Bacon's love of Irish writers, including Joyce, Yeats, and Blackwood, see Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, 46; Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon in Your Blood: A Memoir* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 47–49, 186–87, 260, 287; Farson, 16. Bacon's preference for Celts over the English may have been what led him to repeatedly describe his beloved nanny, Jessie Lightfoot (a surrogate mother figure who even lived with him during his twenties in London), as a "Cornishwoman," despite the fact that there is evidence to suggest that she was from Lancashire. Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, 11, 419.

13. Blackwood, "Francis Bacon (1908–1992)." http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1992/09/24/francis-bacon-19091992/

14. Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, 3.

witnessed and the threats his family endured during the Anglo-Irish War and the civil war. Growing up on the Curragh shaped his love of landscapes as an adult. "I was brought up for much of my childhood on the edge of very flat marshlands full of snipe and plover," he stated. "That's the kind of country I find exciting."[15] And, in what Peppiatt calls "a rare admission of a direct influence," Bacon acknowledged that the shape of many of Farmleigh's rooms "may have been the origin of the curved backgrounds which occur in so many of his compositions."[16]

Critics have noted other ways in which Bacon was shaped by his Irish upbringing.[17] Particularly compelling is Peppiatt's theory regarding the origins of "the tangibly violent sexuality that suffuses so much of [Bacon's] imagery."[18] Francis said that his father used to discipline him by having the grooms in the training stables horsewhip him; he also claimed that his first sexual encounters were with his father's grooms. If the same grooms were involved in the flogging and the sex, it is "tempting," as Peppiatt notes, to suggest this as the source of Bacon's interest in sadomasochism in both his personal life and his art.[19] Bacon's view of his own sexuality was clearly shaped by his Irish upbringing. Bacon, who described himself as "completely homosexual" and who never doubted his sexual orientation (even from earliest childhood), was known, in darker moods, to refer to his homosexuality as "a defect" or "like having a limp."[20] Being gay in a childhood home and society that was hostile to same-sex relations profoundly contributed to the obsession with identity that marks his work.

Bacon's formative years were spent among the unique, culturally hybrid, Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. As a member of the Irish gentry—and, by extension, the wider British aristocracy—Francis was forced to participate in fox hunts and balls. He hated the hunts, developing a severe allergy to horses and once remarking to Blackwood, "Surely there's nothing worse . . . than the dusty saddle lying in the hall."[21] By contrast, he loved the balls, sometimes going to them in drag in the company of his beloved maternal grandmother. At these hunts and balls, there was a keen interest in the social standing of attendees. When Bacon moved to London as an adult, he arrived with a pre-existing sense of the United

15. Peppiatt, *Anatomy,* 14.

16. Peppiatt, *Anatomy,* 17; see also Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon in Your Blood*, 323.

17. See especially Lynn Brunet, *A Course of Severe and Arduous Trials: Bacon, Beckett and Spurious Freemasonry in Early Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009); Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times* (New York: Crown, 1993), esp. chapter one; Farson, chapter two; Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, chapter one.

18. Peppiatt, *Anatomy,* 21.

19. Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, 21.

20. Quoted in Peppiatt, *Anatomy,* 21–22.

21. Blackwood, "Francis Bacon (1908–1992)."

Kingdom's class system and social hierarchies. Though Francis may have socialized with Anglo-Irish and British elite society at these balls—and may even have engaged in risky gender-bending—he did not feel prepared by these experiences for life among the sophisticated and the risqué in the capitals of Europe. In later life, he often linked his social "gaucheness" as a younger man and his initial shock over the sexual liberation he witnessed in Berlin and Paris to his provincial, Irish upbringing. His Anglo-Irish background prepared him for certain aspects of English social life, but being raised in Ireland made him feel like an outsider when he first moved into English high society.

Bacon's family, like many others among the Irish gentry, sent their sons to British public schools. Francis was sent to Dean Close in Cheltenham, where his older brother had gone. Accounts differ as to how long Bacon managed to hang on at the school (some say "a few months" and others say a year and a half).[22] But all agree that Bacon hated it and "made no mark at school."[23] His time there would compound his sense of having a dual identity; when he moved to London in later life, he could say that he—like some of the people he was meeting—went to a British public school. However, this brief experience scarcely made him feel more English; indeed, it may have simply been a foretaste of how it felt to be Irish in England as an adult, as his only friends at the school were—by his own admission—other outsiders: fellow gays and "a Persian boy."[24]

Francis's father had volunteered for a position in the War Office during World War I. This resulted in the family living in London for part of the war. Francis fell in love with Hyde Park, because it was the only area near the family's London residence that reminded him of the landscape back home in Ireland. Although Bacon usually ascribed the violence in his work to the revolutionary period in Ireland, he did once tell Farson that the violence in his work was also traceable to the sense of threat his family felt owing to the bombing carried out by zeppelins during the war.[25] In this sense, the aspect of Bacon's work most frequently described as "Irish" had an "Anglo" aspect, as well.

The adult Bacon was uncertain about his "true self." According to one friend, he seemed to have "a mortal fear of being taken for someone he didn't want to be, and of being unmasked as someone he didn't suspect he was," and this resulted in him being struck with "terror" at the idea of having "a clearly defined identity."[26] This was the perhaps inevitable reaction of a sensitive man whose background, upbringing, and displacement rendered his identity too

22. Farson, 15; see also Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, 23.
23. Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, 24.
24. Peppiatt, *Anatomy*, 23.
25. Farson, 15.
26. Zinovy Zinik, *Mind the Doors* (New York: Context Books, 2001), 8.

complex to be explained by simple signifiers like name, nationality, and religion. In Bacon's paintings, he elected to visually depict this "fragmentation of self"—that is, the psychological "distortion" created by having an Irish self and an English self, an Irish past and an English past—by creating portraits in which he would paint the same face twice, on top of one other but at slightly different angles.[27] The resulting "fragmented faces," which often "evoke the idea of a doubly-exposed photograph," offer "a superimposition of states in which certain characteristics of the person concerned appear with exceptional intensity while others are obliterated."[28] In the case of self-portraits, this is Bacon's visual representation of the way in which personality traits that might be thought of popularly as "Irish" or "English" are exaggerated or obliterated by the geographical displacement of exile.

As Richard Dorment has noted, in Bacon's portraits, he was always "searching for the essence of the person, that elusive and constantly changing element that is an individual's identity."[29] A good example of Bacon's attempt to capture the "elusive," mercurial nature of a fragmented identity is his *Self-Portrait* from 1974. In this painting, the superimposing of one face on top of another results in special emphasis being placed on Bacon's mouth, and also causes one of his ears to disappear. A careful look reveals, too, that Bacon is hinting that he has more than one set of eyes. Many critics assume that the personality split that Bacon depicts in self-portraits such as this one relates exclusively to his conflicted feelings over his homosexuality and his physical appearance.[30] Yet issues arising from exile and hyphenated identity might also suggest why, in *Self-Portrait* (1974), Bacon chose to exaggerate or obliterate these particular facial features.

Bacon's use of "double exposure" has resulted in one of his two mouths appearing to have very large lips, making it a mouth reminiscent of the one at the center of Beckett's *Not I*, which most critics believe was influenced by Bacon's paintings.[31] This large mouth arguably represents the talkative side of Bacon's personality—a trait that his friends (and even Bacon himself) associated with

27. Leuthold, 16.

28. Brunet, 23; Richard Dorment, "A Fresh Side of Bacon," *Telegraph*, 22 June 2005; John Russell, quoted in Christophe Domino, *Francis Bacon: 'Taking Reality by Surprise'* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 121.

29. Dorment, "A Fresh Side of Bacon."

30. Bacon claimed to "loathe" his own face, yet he painted it repeatedly. As one critic notes, his explanation that he only did so many self-portraits because he "had nobody else to do" was "wilfully disingenuous." Rachel Campbell-Johnston, "'I Had Nobody Else to Paint,'" *Times*, 26 May 2006.

31. Bacon is believed to have seen *Not I* in London two years before this portrait was painted. In an interview, Bacon said that his favorite works by Beckett were the short pieces starring Billie Whitelaw that he saw in London. It is not known for certain if he saw some or all of these productions, which included *Play* (1962), *Footfalls* (1976), *Rockaby* (1981), and *Not I*. See Fifield, 57–71.

his supposedly Irish habit of drinking heavily.[32] The second set of lips, beneath the larger ones, are smaller and literally "down in the mouth." This second mouth may represent the more diffident side of Bacon's personality, which inclines him, as an outsider in a country not his own, to speak quietly, perhaps even with shame or self-pity. Richard Dorment is correct in contending that the "self-pity" evident in some of Bacon's portraits is clearly linked to "the tormented artist's struggle for identity."[33] The presence of the two mouths also suggests that exile has split and exacerbated these two aspects of the immigrant Bacon's personality. Overall, Bacon's decision to distort the faces in his self-portraits—many are battered-looking and some even contain black voids or are missing features—suggests that Bacon believes that the exile is harmed or diminished by having lived in two different places and under two different codes.

In comparing Bacon's "fragmented faces" to Samuel Beckett's radio play *The Old Tune*, two important parallels emerge. First, *The Old Tune* is built around two old Irish men, Gorman and Cream, reminiscing about their younger days, much as, in Bacon's later portraits, the central faces are often haunted by the "ghosts of younger lives."[34] Gorman and Cream argue over the details of their past, particularly matters concerning place, because they are confusing the English place where they have lived as adults with the Dublin suburb where they grew up, and the two places are, naturally, an imperfect match. In the same way, Bacon suggests through his "distorted" self-portraits that the Irish self and the English self, the Irish past and the English past, do not entirely match up, creating an argument within the self.

Ever since *The Old Tune* was first broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme on August 23, 1960, critics have disagreed about whether the play is set in England or Ireland. *The Old Tune* is a free translation of French writer Robert Pinget's 1960 radio play *La Manivelle*, and, in an interview in 1967, Pinget claimed that when Beckett offered to translate the play, he said that he intended to set the English-language version in Dublin.[35] Commentators agree that the play's

32. See, for example, Tadeusz Rózewicz, "Francis Bacon or Diego Velázquez in a Dentist's Chair," *Ambit* 150 (1997), 17–23.

33. Richard Dorment, "The Body and Soul of Francis Bacon," *Daily Telegraph*, 2 February 1998.

34. Isla Leaver-Yap, "Francis Bacon at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art," *Culture 24*, 22 June 2005.

35. When Randolph Goodman interviewed the French playwright in 1967, Pinget explained that Beckett "offered to put my play into English. As he only translates his own material, I considered his offer a great kindness. Beckett wanted to set the scene of the play in Dublin and turn my Parisians into Irishmen; I gave him my permission to do so. It is a model translation." Quoted in Randolph Goodman, *From Script to Stage: Eight Modern Plays* (San Francisco: Rinehart, 1971), 550. Curiously,

Francis Bacon. *Self-Portrait* (1974). Oil on canvas. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS, London/IVARO, Dublin, 2018.

characters speak in a rich Hiberno-English reminiscent of O'Casey, but there has been debate over whether the action actually takes place in Dublin.[36] Vivian Mercier and T.P. Dolan have suggested that the play is set "somewhere in England."[37] The promotional material for John Calder's edition of the play states that the setting is "what could be pre-independence Ireland."[38] The editors of the *Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* are certain that the play is set in Beckett's native Dublin.[39] A 2006 production of the play at the Kilkenny Arts Festival advertised the piece as taking place in "rural Ireland."[40] Beckett's letters confirm that the play's two characters are Irishmen living in England, and, intriguingly, he feigns surprise when informed by Barbara Bray that her colleagues at the BBC are confused as to where the play is set (he claims that he "can't see . . . what [Bray] means" when she insists that "difficulties . . . might exist for English listeners" if the two characters speak with Irish accents but refer to English places).[41] Beckett's claim that he cannot "understand" the BBC's

on another occasion, Pinget contradicted the idea that the play is set in Dublin, contending that "Sam has transported the [play's] French atmosphere into an Anglo-Irish one. My two old codgers, French of the French, have become two Irishmen living in London." Notes, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, 1957–1965*, ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 266. In letters written to Pinget while translating the play, Beckett makes clear that *The Old Tune* is set in England; Pinget's confusion may indicate that Beckett was originally planning to set the play in Dublin.

36. On the play's Hiberno-English, see Vivian Mercier, "Beckett's Anglo-Irish Stage Dialects," *James Joyce Quarterly* 8, 4 (Summer, 1971), 315; T. P. Dolan, "Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Use of Hiberno-English," *Irish University Review* 14, 1 (Spring, 1984), 55; Barry McGovern, "Beckett and the Radio Voice," in *Samuel Beckett: 100 Years: Centenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: New Island Books, 2006), 132. Much as Synge's translations of Petrarch and Villon change relatively straightforward phrases in Latin and French into exceptionally ornate Hiberno-English, Beckett changes Pinget's spare—though certainly colloquial—language into a more verbose Dublin argot. Beckett even adds bits of dialogue for "Irish" comic effect. A good example is when one of Pinget's old men recalls of a friend, "Il est mort en 14." ("He died in 1914.") In Beckett's version, this becomes, "He died in 1914. Wounds." The addition of this one word adds dark, Irish humor to the line. Robert Pinget, *La Manivelle: Édition bilingue avec texte anglais de Samuel Beckett, suivi de Lettre Morte* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1960), 57–58.

37. Mercier, 315; Dolan, 49.

38. Calder Publications Ltd. Product Description details for the 1999 edition of *The Old Tune*. See also John Calder, Postface to *The Old Tune*, by Samuel Beckett (London: Calder Publications, 1999), 24.

39. Chris Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to his Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 277.

40. Kilkenny Arts Festival, Online Programme, https://issuu.com/kilkennyartsfestival/docs/kaf2006.

41. Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, 1957–1965*, ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 258; 261. See also Beckett, *Letters,* 260, 265.

confusion over the play's setting is disingenuous, however; he deliberately included personal names, placenames, and historical references in the play that could be either English or Irish.[42] In a letter to Bray dated December 1, 1959, Beckett tells her that he cannot clear up the confusion over the setting by placing the two characters in Ireland, because "the two old chaps have a displaced persons quality which is perhaps not without significance."[43] As this coy remark indicates, Beckett wants to suggest in the play that the two "displaced" men are confusing the Ireland where they were raised with the England where they currently live. Beckett thus adds an extra layer to the play not present in Pinget's original. Whereas the confusion of Pinget's old men is ascribable to dotage alone, Beckett's Irishmen are at the mercy of both senility and the disorientation created by geographical exile.

As Vivian Mercier points out, these two characters do not just speak Hiberno-English, they speak "some of the purest Dublin dialect to be found outside the plays of O'Casey and Brendan Behan." Mercier goes on to gloss many of their "specifically Dublin expressions."[44] It is also clear that the characters spent their youth in the Dublin suburbs (and not Dublin City), and have spent their adulthood in a town or suburb in England (and likewise, not in a city proper), because the forgetful old men repeatedly confuse the two semi-green, semi-urbanized places. Gorman and Cream claim to remember that in their youth, the area where they are standing was all fields and was considered "the outskirts."[45] The word from Pinget's original play that Beckett translates as "outskirts" is *banlieue*, which can also be translated as "suburbs." The men are remembering the area as getting more built up over time, something that undoubtedly happened in both the Dublin suburb and the English town where they have passed their lives.

The two men both moved to England when they joined the British Army. Cream recalls that he joined the army in 1903, followed by Gorman in 1906; the towns where they say they were stationed are all in England.[46] Their faulty

42. Beckett, *Letters,* 265.

43. Beckett, *Letters,* 260.

44. Mercier, 315.

45. Samuel Beckett, *The Old Tune*, Free Translation of *La Manivelle*, by Robert Pinget (London: Calder Publications, 1999), 6; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*OT* 6).

46. As Dublin-born British Army veterans, Gorman and Cream can be compared to Mercier and Camier (from the 1946 Beckett novel of the same name), who are Irish veterans of the Boer War. Other Irish-born British Army veterans in Beckett include the park ranger from *Mercier and Camier*, and perhaps Mrs. Lousse's late husband from *Molloy* (1951). The ranger, who fought in World War I, "sometimes felt it would have been wiser on his part, during the great upheaval, to devote his energies to the domestic skirmish, the Gaelic dialect, the fortification of his faith, and the treasures of a folklore beyond compare. The bodily danger would have been less and the benefits more certain." Samuel Beckett, *Mercier and Camier* (London: Calder Publications, 1974), 14. Mrs. Lousse informs us that her "dear departed" had "fallen in defence of a country that called itself his and from

memories mean that we cannot be sure exactly where they were stationed—they debate whether they were in Chatham, Chester, Caterham, or Chesham. (In fact, they are likely confusing all of these places with Catterick, a major garrison town in North Yorkshire.) Arguments over the layouts of these towns—especially whether it was Morrison's Pub or Harrison's Oak Lounge on the corner in Chatham—suggest that they do not know these places very well. The men's unfamiliarity with these towns casts additional doubt on the play's setting. Listeners might legitimately conclude that it indicates that the men are living in Ireland and only dimly remember the England they lived in for a relatively brief time many years previously.

Beckett also obscures the play's setting through the men's discussions of Cream's son, the County Court judge, who is described as "ladling out . . . divorces" (*OT* 13) as part of his job. The outlawing of divorce in Ireland in 1925, and Cream's use of the British title of "County Court" judge, would lead many listeners to conclude that the play is set in England. It is presumably these same references that led John Calder to suggest that the setting is pre-Independence Ireland, when Irish law and legal institutions still originated in Westminster. Yet the play cannot have taken place in pre-Independence Ireland: the men are too young to have been senior citizens then, and further, they discuss as contemporary many things that happened long after Irish independence, such as the media hysteria about sending someone to the moon. All this talk of space travel suggests that they are having their conversation in the same year that Beckett's translation was completed, 1960. Similarly, the two men discuss "atom rockets" (*OT* 11), so the play takes place after the nuclear age began.

Unsurprisingly, Beckett does not completely allow the divorce references and the British job title to confirm that the men raised their families in England and still live there. The only actual divorce case mentioned in the script is that of Gorman's niece, which he remembers as having taken place "thirty years ago" (*OT* 12) or 1930. We can readily believe that a man with such a faulty memory is confused as to how long ago the case took place. His niece's divorce case could have taken place before the Irish ban on divorce, and the confused old men could easily be mistaken in thinking that Cream's son still "ladles" out divorces as part of his job as an Irish judge. Beckett deliberately leaves this point, and the job title, uncertain and open to interpretation. Whether or not the men did return to Ireland after their military service in England, they are still confusing laws, nomenclature, and events that took place in both countries. In this sense, the men reside psychologically in both countries at once.

Beckett performs another type of double exposure involving Ireland and

which in his lifetime he never derived the smallest benefit, but only insults and vexations." Samuel Beckett, *Trilogy: Molloy / Malone Dies / The Unnamable* (London: Calder Publications, 1994), 33.

England by means of his characters' names. Gorman and Cream, as we have established, were born and raised in Ireland, and therefore, Beckett gives them plausibly Irish names; Gorman is definitely an Irish surname, and Cream could be.[47] Many of the characters they recall from their youth in the 1890s, such as "Da" Drummond, Molly Berry, and Eva Hart, have what seem to be Irish names. Others from that phase of their lives possess what seem to be Irish Protestant names, such as St. John Fitzball and his relations Hester and Victoria, Oscar and Helen Bliss, Rosie Plumpton, Nelly Crowther, Alfred and Gertie Crumplin, and especially Mr. Overend: the Overend family were the colorful and well-known owners of the Airfield Estate in Dundrum, County Dublin, during Beckett's formative years in nearby Foxrock. And yet, these names could also be English, and the men, in their dotage, may be confusing Protestants they knew in Ireland with English people they met after moving to England. Adding to this uncertainty, the people whom Cream's children have married also have names that could be either English or Irish Protestant. Cream's daughter, Bertha, married a man called Rupert Moody, and their children are called Hubert, Johnny, Ronnie, and the royalist-sounding "Queenie."

On the basis of such names, we might surmise that Gorman and Cream—like countless real-life Irishmen—met English women while in the army and settled with them permanently in England. But names from Beckett's biography and the play itself mitigate against such a straightforward conclusion. "Queenie" may sound quite English, but Beckett's Irish landlady in London was a Queenie Frost, making the name yet another conflicted reference planted into the work by its author. Likewise, in the play, a figure from the old men's youth, "Da" Drummond, is described as having bought a rubber hose "after the war 1920 maybe" (*OT* 8), suggesting that Gorman and Cream may have moved back to their native Ireland after World War I. Later in the play, when discussing a contemporary court case about a sex maniac, the old men cannot remember if the defendant's surname is Carton or Barton. Carton is an Irish surname, and the surname Barton also belongs to a famous Protestant family from North Wicklow, a family that would have been known to the Synges and the Becketts.[48] The

47. There is a married couple called Gorman in the novel *Watt* (1953), which is set around Foxrock. If the elderly man in *The Old Tune* is the same Mr. Gorman—that is, if Gorman is one of the "gallery of moribunds" who resurface repeatedly in Beckett's fiction (Murphy, Watt, Mercier, Malone, etc.)—then it is further confirmation of the men's Dublin origins and could lead listeners familiar with Beckett's work to assume a Dublin setting for *The Old Tune*. Beckett, *Trilogy*, 138.

48. This was the Barton family that raised the English-born Irish patriot Erskine Childers after the death of his parents. The confusion over the name Barton also reminds us of Beckett's novella *The Calmative* (1946), in which the narrator cannot remember whether the story his father told him as a child was about Jim Breen, bearer of an Irish surname, or Jim Breem, bearer of an English—or Irish Protestant—one.

old men's faulty memories prevent us from completely trusting their recollections of names, but the cultural ambiguity of the names being debated—as well as Beckett's decision to use Mrs. Frost's enigmatic first name—are enough to keep listeners confused about the setting.

The placenames Beckett employs generate further confusion. The men are firmly convinced that the places from their fin-de-siècle childhood, when their fathers served on the local town council, took place in the area that surrounds them in the play, and they provide us with several of these local placenames. What is curious about the plethora of names provided in *The Old Tune* is its departure from Beckett's frequent practice, in his postwar work, of describing places that the discerning reader will recognize as being in greater Dublin but which Beckett leaves unidentified.[49] Such unnamed Dublin places include the two canals in the novella *First Love* (written in 1946); the narrator's visions of the gorse fires (probably on Howth or Three Rock Mountain), and the river that flows in "the wrong direction" into a bay with four beacons including one lightship, in the novella *The End* (1946); there is the house on a canal where a mother is dying, and a jetty that is probably Dun Laoghaire (or possibly Greystones) pier, in the 1958 play *Krapp's Last Tape*; and there is a bow window looking west toward the mountains in the 1980 novella *Company* (probably Cooldrinagh's view of the Dublin Mountains).[50] *The Old Tune*, by contrast, contains numerous placenames but none that can be fixed in either Dublin or England. The Irish-sounding names in the play could be in England; indeed, there are locations all over England bearing the Irish-sounding placenames found in *The Old Tune*.[51] For example, there are a few references in the play to the Sheen Road. The road could be in Ireland, but there are also Sheen Roads in Richmond in Surrey, as well as in Orpington in Kent and in Eastbourne in East Sussex. Cream's confusion of the Sheen Road with the Marston Road at one point may also suggest an English setting; there are seven Marston Roads scattered throughout England and none in Ireland.[52]

But two things hint that Beckett meant an Irish road. One is the remark

49. Of course, this is not really a deliberate departure from previous practice on Beckett's part. The idea of old men remembering and misremembering numerous placenames comes straight from Pinget's *La Manivelle*.

50. Samuel Beckett, *First Love and Other Novellas* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 69. For other unnamed locations readily identifiable as Dublin and Wicklow landscapes, see Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland* (Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1986).

51. Of course, for every Dublin place with an Irish-derived name like Kilbarrack or Carrickmines, there are places with deeply English names like Shrewsbury Road or Heytesbury Street. England, too, has placenames of Irish origin, such as Ranelagh Gardens and Great Ormond Street (both in London).

52. The seven Marston Roads in England can be found in Wolverhampton, Oxford, Stafford, Salford, St. Neots, Hellidon, and Ilford.

that Gorman's father owned a place out on the Sheen Road in the 1890s, which makes it unlikely that it is a Sheen Road they only came to know after their move to England. Second, the Sheen Road in the play is described as being "out beyond Shackleton's sawpit" (*OT* 8). The Shackletons were a prominent Kildare and Dublin family, the most famous of whom is the explorer Ernest Shackleton. But we still cannot be confident regarding the setting, because there are three places named Shackleton in London—Shackleton Court, Shackleton Lodge, and Shackleton House—and there is also a Shackleton Close in Ash Dale in Surrey. As far as listeners are concerned, when Gorman says that they did not get running water into the house on the Sheen Road until 1925, he might be accurately remembering that he had it put into the house he inherited from his father after he moved back to Ireland after World War I, or he might be remembering getting running water into his house in England and confusing it with the house he grew up in back in Ireland.

Another place named in the play is Cruddy. It is unclear from the text if it is the name of an area or the name of a house, such as "The Turrets," mentioned later in the play. Gorman says that his family were still out at Cruddy in 1895, so it once again seems to be a place from the mens' Irish childhoods, but, although Cruddy is an Irish surname, it is also a word in the English language. Thus, it could be a place in England that Gorman mistakenly remembers having been in the Ireland of his boyhood. A third seemingly Irish placename that may, in fact, be in England is the house referred to as Marrable. The men remember that this house burned down during their Irish youth in 1897, and, according to census records, there were two Protestant Marrable families living in south County Dublin in Beckett's youth.[53] The son of one of these south Dublin Marrable families, Francis Arthur Marrable of Druid Hill, Cabinteely, died in World War I.[54] However, the Irishness of the play's Marrable reference is compromised by the name Marrable itself, which is of English origin, and both of Francis's parents were born in England. A personal connection between this family and the Becketts would be difficult to establish, but the Marrables did attend the Kilternan Church of Ireland near Foxrock. Francis's mother, Mary Ann, is buried in the Kilternan church grounds, and, interestingly, several of the Anglo-Irish first names mentioned in *The Old Tune* appear on tombstones in that graveyard, including Queenie, Hubert, Hester, Victoria, Alfred, and Helen.[55] All of the deceased bearing these names were contemporaries of Beckett.

53. See the 1911 Irish Census, available at http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie.

54. Tullow Church Memorial Page, available at http://www.irishmedals.org/tully-church-foxrock.html.

55. See the list of tombstones in the Kilternan Church of Ireland graveyard, available at http://www.igp-web.com/IGPArchives/ire/dublin/photos/tombstones/1headstones/kilternan.txt.

A mention of Swan's Bookseller is another conflicted reference. If Swan is the owner's surname, then it is another location with a name that could be either Irish or English. There have been prominent people named Swan in Dublin for centuries, including seven families in south County Dublin during Beckett's youth. There was no Swan's Bookseller in Dublin in Beckett's time, but there was and is the famous Swan Bar, established in 1897. There is also a famous bookstore in Upminster in Essex called Swan Books. That said, Swan Books was established in 1937, more a year after Beckett left England (he lived in London intermittently between 1933 and 1935).

The final Irish-sounding place name that may actually be in England is Saint Theresa's boarding school. Gorman and Cream say Nelly Crowther was sent to this convent school, where her manners were polished and where she was taught French. The name is ubiquitous throughout Ireland in relation to Roman Catholic institutions, sometimes in tribute to the French Saint Thérèse, the Little Flower of Lisieux, and sometimes in honor of the Spanish Saint Teresa of Ávila. (Beckett, of course, elects to reference the French saint when choosing the spelling for the boarding school in his play.) Beckett most likely chose the name because it seemed like a good generic name for a Catholic girl's school and because its French resonances appealed to him.[56] If, however, he was thinking of an actual Irish or English institution, St. Teresa's was, in Beckett's youth, the name for what is now the George's Hill Presentation Convent in Halston Street in Dublin 7. On the other hand, there is a St. Teresa's boarding school for girls in Dorking in Surrey. If the Sheen Road mentioned in the play is the one in Richmond, then the men's reference to Nelly being sent "out" to the school would work better than if the play were set in a Dublin suburb, because, in that case, Nelly would have been sent "in" to the St. Teresa's in the Dublin city center.

The final place name mentioned is Pollox Street, an English-sounding name that could also be in Dublin. There is no Pollox Street in either England or in Ireland, but there is one in the fictional London of A.T. Quiller-Couch's popular collection of horror stories *Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts* (1900). Although we lack evidence that Beckett read this work, it is the type of lowbrow book that he often read in order to relax.[57] *Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts* would have been especially interesting to Beckett, as it was not only written by a man who used the Beckettian pseudonym of Q, it also deals with themes that obsessed Beckett

56. In Pinget's original play, the school is called Saint-Maxerde's, and the girl is taught English. Pinget, *La Manivelle*, 54.

57. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1996), 372.

throughout his career.[58] In the preface, Quiller-Couch writes that "The stories in this book are of *revenants*: persons who either in spirit or in body revisit old scenes, return upon old selves or old emotions, or relate a message from a world beyond perception."[59] Haunted characters languishing in a purgatorial space are familiar figures in Beckett's works such as *The Unnamable* (1953) or *Play* (1963).

In addition to embedding conflicted personal names, placenames, and historical references into the play, Beckett also creates confusion through the men's repeated insistence that the Irish childhood and youth they reminisce about took place near the spot where they are standing in the play. For example, Gorman is convinced that the first motor car he ever saw as a youth was a Pic-Pic at the very corner of the street where the men are standing. Cream corrects him, saying the car in question was a "Dee Dyan Button" (*OT* 7). As it happens, Beckett's father was the first person to own a De Dion Bouton in Ireland, and, as Beckett revealed in the semi-autobiographical novella *Company* (1980), his father sat in the car in the coach house while May Beckett was in labor with her famous son in April 1906. On the other hand, De Dion Bouton was the leading car manufacturer in the world by 1900 and this period of 1900 to Beckett's birth in 1906 overlaps conveniently with Gorman and Cream joining the military and going to England—so, despite Beckett's connection of the car to his Dublin childhood in *Company*, the sighting of the De Dion could easily have taken place after both men moved to England. Moreover, the Pic-Pic and De Dion argument also appears in Pinget's *La Manivelle*.

Although the De Dion Bouton reference may not confirm an Irish setting, an Irish connection related to cars appears in the play in Beckett's decision to use the surname Overend. Letitia and Naomi Overend, two remarkable sisters who resided at Airfield in Dundrum throughout Beckett's Irish years, were well-known throughout Dublin for their love of automobiles. In making a free translation of a play consumed with automobiles (in addition to the Pic-Pic or De Dion debate, the stage directions refer repeatedly to the sound of cars passing), Beckett obviously recalled the familiar sight of Letitia driving her Rolls Royce and Naomi driving her Austin Tickford around south County Dublin in high style.[60]

58. In some thirteen Beckett plays, characters have names which are simply letters of the alphabet. In most cases, however, Beckett reveals what these letters stand for, either in the stage directions or through the dialogue.

59. A.T. Quiller-Couch, *Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts: A Book of Stories* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1973), v.

60. For more on the Overend sisters (and their mother, Lily) see Bernadette Larkin, "The Overend Women: Independent Women of the 1900s," The Women's Museum of Ireland, available at http://womensmuseumofireland.ie/articles/the-overend-women.

It appears then, that—although Beckett knows he is writing about two Irishmen living in England—he deliberately sabotages any attempt by listeners to pin down the location of play. In doing so, Beckett represents the mentality of people in exile. For these two old and clearly confused Irish men, the town where they grew up is fusing with the places in England where they have lived as adults, making them residents of both and neither at the same time. To invoke an overused and frequently misapplied concept, Gorman and Cream reside in a "liminal space." Just as Beckett depicted psychological exile in the *Four Novellas* by superimposing "Paris and the river Seine on Dublin and the river Liffey," and just as he set the novel *Murphy* in a part of London that was laid out in a similar fashion to Dublin, he has placed an English town or suburb on top of a Dublin suburb in *The Old Tune*.[61] Gorman and Cream are psychologically torn between Ireland and England—as are numerous other figures in modern Irish literature.[62] This sense of being psychologically adrift between England and Ireland was well understood, not only by Beckett's characters in *The Old Tune*, but also by Francis Bacon, as an artist from an Anglo-Irish background who spent most of his adult life in London.

Beckett and Bacon share more than a sense of exile from the Ireland of their birth; the work of both men is more Irish than critics often admit, particularly that of Bacon. But both artists allowed some ambiguity into their Irish identities, by acknowledging the British aspects that are necessarily part of an Anglo-Irish Protestant identity. In Bacon's case, this Irish-British cultural hybridity is implicit in his tendency to emphasize, or alternately, to hide, his Irish origins in interviews and conversation. As for Beckett, *The Old Tune* is not the only example of his linking English and Irish culture, and English and Irish placenames, in his work. During Lucky's speech in the English-language version of *Waiting for Godot* (1954), there is a reference to the Irish field game "camogie" but

61. Dukes, Introduction, *First Love and Other Novellas*, 3.

62. It is easy to compile a list of such figures, such as the laborers in Timothy O'Grady's novel *I Could Read The Sky* (1997) and Mary Lavin's short story "The Girders" (1944), as well as key characters in the work of Martin McDonagh, Jimmy McGovern, Edna O'Brien, John McGahern, Leland Bardwell, Tom Murphy, and John B. Keane, not to mention the songs of Shane MacGowan. The ruffians in "Boys from the County Hell" (1984), by the London-Irish McGowan, are tellingly "from" a place that does not exist in either England or Ireland. Pato Dooley, from Martin McDonagh's play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), sums up the feelings of several of the characters created by these writers when, on a trip "home" to Ireland from England, he muses: "When it's there I am, it's here I wish I was... But when it's here I am... it isn't there I want to be, of course not. But I know it isn't here I want to be either." Martin McDonagh, *Plays 1: The Beauty Queen of Leenane / A Skull in Connemara / The Lonesome West* (London: Methuen, 1999), 22.

also to what the Gaelic Athletic Association has traditionally regarded as "foreign games" (football, tennis, and "hockey of all kinds"), and Beckett changes the entirely French placenames from *En Attendant Godot* (1952) to "Connemara" but also to the greater London railway stations "Peckham Fulham [and] Clapham."[63] Likewise, in the 1953 novel *Watt*, Jimmy Shannon (the name of the postman from Beckett's youth in Foxrock) is renamed Mr. Severn, replacing Ireland's longest river with England's. Beckett also came close to conflating "English" and "Irish" in *Watt*, when the narrator mentions "what I think the English call six of one and half a dozen of the other" and then wonders, "or do I confuse them with the Irish?"[64]

It seems likely, too, that Beckett was critiquing the abrupt severing of ties between the two countries in his original choice for the cover of *Murphy* (1938), a novel in which he is scathing about the cultural and political narrowness of the Irish Free State. Beckett's preferred cover was a photo of two monkeys playing chess, which featured the caption: "What! You are giving up your Queen? Sheer madness!"[65] His repeated topographical linking of (and his muddying of the differences between) England and Ireland are an Irish Protestant's attempt, post-Independence, to suggest that the tie between the two countries is not severed as easily as narrow-gauge nationalists would like.

Beckett and Bacon may have acknowledged Irish-British cultural hybridity, but there remains something quintessentially Irish—and definitely not British—about the preoccupation with exile that marks so much of their work. For Bacon, this preoccupation with exile results in portraits mimicking photographic "double-exposure" to reveal the "fragmented" identity of the sitter. In Beckett's case, it frequently takes the form of Irish characters living outside of Ireland, confusing Irish places with the place where they are currently residing. One of his most interesting examinations of exile is the brief picture we get of the two Dublin men in *The Old Tune*—perhaps Protestants, and clearly veterans of the British Army—who are torn between the Ireland and the England they have physically and psychologically served and where they have humbly passed their lives.

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63. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 29.
64. Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 58.
65. Between pp. 174 and 175 of Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Vintage, 2002).