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"A Country That Called Itself His": Molloy and Beckett's Estranged Relationship with Ireland

by JUDE R. MECHE

The device common to the poets of the Revival and after, in the use of which even beyond the jewels of language they are at one, is that of flight from self-awareness.... At the centre there is no theme. Why not? Because the centre is simply not that kind of girl, and no more about it.... The [Revival] poem of poems would embrace the sense of confinement, the getaway, the vicissitudes of the road, the wan bliss of the rim.

Samuel Beckett, "Recent Irish Poetry" (71)

THROUGHOUT MOST of his critical reception, scholars and critics have associated Samuel Beckett with continental Europe and with an international, cosmopolitan art.¹ Indeed, his subject matter—encompassing attempted escapes from self-awareness, suggestions of confinement (both physical and intellectual), and the ever-present desire for escape and freedom (even from the necessity of living)—has historically led critics to an understanding of Beckett as an Existentialist writer or as a member of Martin Esslin's transnational Theatre of the Absurd. More recently, however, his violation of narrative authority, his destabilization of identity, and his challenge to traditional form have all contributed to our perception of Beckett as a *postmodern* author. Yet as Beckett here describes the work of the poets of the Irish Literary Revival, he attributes to these Irish writers many of the qualities that have led critics to conclude that he works in the tradition of the cosmopolitan, continental author.

Beckett, of course, can hardly be described as sympathetic in his review of "Recent Irish Poetry"; however, the similarities between the young Beckett's descriptions of Revival poetry and the works he would later write are difficult to dismiss.² These similarities, in fact, challenge readers *not* to consider Beckett a product of an Irish literary tradition. And in recent studies of Beckett and his work, scholars appear largely unanimous in their desire to accept the possibility of Irish influences in Beckett's work. Lois Gordon's *The World of Samuel Beckett, 1906–1946* is one example of this new move-

1. The author would like to thank Katherine E. Kelly for the invaluable feedback offered upon earlier drafts of this article.

2. Certainly, a work like *Molloy* contains all of these characteristics: the flight from self-awareness in Moran's denial of his true relationship to Molloy, a centerless structure, a sense of confinement at Lousse's home, escape from this confinement, Molloy's adventures on the road, and Molloy's sense of comfort existing on the periphery of society.

ment in Beckett studies. Her cultural biography narrows its focus to Beckett's first forty years partly out of the belief that "it is fruitful to consider the historical period in which he developed as a man and writer—Dublin and its environs during the Irish civil war and World War I" (5). Of course, Gordon—while the first to emphasize Beckett's early life in Ireland—is not the first to approach his work as a commentary upon and extension of Irish culture. John P. Harrington had previously published the first full-length study of Beckett's literary connections with the country of his birth; and in this study, entitled *The Irish Beckett*,³ Harrington disputes the earlier understanding of Beckett as an author belonging to and writing out of no specific geographical location or cultural history.⁴ And, of course, others have followed Harrington's lead into this new area of Beckett studies.⁵

Yet this new direction in Beckett studies has not limited itself to merely (re)placing Beckett and his works on Irish soil. Nor has this branch of Beckett commentary stopped short of addressing Beckett's place in the postcolonial framework through which much of Irish literature is currently being investigated. David Lloyd has made inroads into this unexplored but potentially vast new landscape in his essay "Writing in the Shit: Beckett, Nationalism, and the Colonial Subject." Lloyd begins his study of the colonial subject in Beckett's *oeuvre* at one of the few points, in *First Love*, at which Beckett explicitly comments upon Irish nationalism. His study, though, branches out to examine the work's narrator as a colonial subject expelled from the patriarchal sphere after his father's death and left spiritually destitute by the loss of the power in contrast to which he identified himself.

Attempting a postcolonial reading of Beckett, however, is not an easy feat. Though Harrington, Junker, Ricks, and Gordon have demonstrated any number of Irish influences in and upon Beckett's works, explicit comments upon Ireland's political situation (such as the commentary upon Irish patriots in *First Love* that allows Lloyd to make his argument) are rare. Their absence, as well as the absence of overt political statements of any other kind, have earned Beckett his reputation as one of the most apolitical of twentieth-cen-

3. Harrington's study shapes Beckett's *oeuvre* "rather differently than is customary in Beckett studies" (4). He focuses primarily upon *More Pricks Than Kicks*, *Murphy*, and *Watt* and offers only abbreviated discussions of Beckett's major fiction and dramas.

4. This perception of Beckett is crystallized best in Richard Ellmann's descriptive chapter title for a discussion of Beckett: "The Nayman from Noland," from *Four Dubliners: Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett* (New York: George Braziller, 1988).

5. Mary Junker's *Beckett: The Irish Dimension* extends Harrington's examination of Irish contexts in Beckett's works by focusing upon *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *All That Fall*, *Eh Joe* and *That Time*. Also, Christopher Ricks has devoted part of his study of *Beckett's Dying Words* to outlining the Irish origins of the author and playwright's self-defeating language. Ricks offers perhaps one of the best discussions of the Irish influence upon Beckett's language in his discussion of the Irish Bull. Using the *OED*'s definition of the Irish Bull as "[a] self-contradictory proposition; in modern use, an expression containing a manifest contradiction in terms or involving a ludicrous inconsistency unperceived by the speaker" (qtd. in Ricks 153), he elaborates on Beckett's use of this "form of linguistic suicide" as not only a humorous device but a means of gaining power by creating uncertainty in the listener or reader (155). While the *OED* admits that the term existed before it was associated with the Irish, Ricks notes that the bull is nevertheless opposed to the "English tradition . . . of being in no doubt about the matter" (154) and is, therefore, useful as a means of resistance, forcing uncertainty (concerning whether the bull was offered inadvertently or sardonically) upon a reader invested in his/her certainty.

tury authors. Yet added to this difficulty for the postcolonial critic, Beckett's texts offer few overt references to a geographical location—actual or fictitious—that has suffered colonization or has been reclaimed from imperial control. This absence of references to both the politics of imperialism and the resisting colonized as well as the absence of any specific evidence of a colonial history in Beckett's texts would seemingly make any postcolonial reading of his work impossible.

What does make such a reading at all possible is Beckett's concern with identity. The typical Beckettian character finds him- or herself constantly engaged in an exploration of an identity that cannot be confirmed without the verification of an opposing Other. In *The Unnamable*, for instance, Mahood begins to experience anxiety over his existence when his caretaker Marguerite no longer takes any notice of him (344-45). While often validating identity for Beckett's narrators, these figures also appear repeatedly as threatening forces, disrupting the lives of Beckett's narrators by attempting to control them or by making demands of them. This conflict—occurring repeatedly in Beckett's *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*—resembles the postcolonial model of the conflict between colonizer and colonized. Likewise, the manner in which Beckett's narrators resist these outsiders' domination, their narration of their own histories, is not unlike the colonial subject's resistance to the colonizer's grand narratives through his or her refusal to accept the validity of (and sometimes the form of) imperial narratives.

Yet while there exist such inroads into Beckett's works and while others such as Lloyd have undertaken an exploration of these semblances of the postcolonial in his works, the models of postcolonial Ireland used to read Beckett's works are often inappropriately simple. While nevertheless offering a thorough reading of postcolonial and (anti)nationalist elements in *First Love*, Lloyd chooses not to consider the impact of the author's Protestant heritage upon the work. However, Beckett's Protestant heritage may offer satisfying explanations not only for the ambivalence to postcolonial/nationalist Ireland in his *oeuvre* but also for his conscious and careful reformulation of himself from an Irish scholar into a cosmopolitan author and playwright as well.

SINCE IRISH PROTESTANTS would likely experience the loss of the patriarchal, English colonizer and the subsequent growth of Irish nationalism as more of a threat to their cultural identity than as a moment of liberation from an Other who summarily and unjustly scribes them, one might reasonably assume that Beckett's physical retreat from Ireland as well as his reluctance to admit matters of Irish politics into his works originates out of the Protestant's inability to identify fully with those Irish patriots instrumental in the 1916 Easter Rising or in the formation of an independent Irish Republic. Indeed, Lois Gordon and Anthony Cronin both point to such complicating factors that might have challenged the young Beckett's sense of belonging in Ireland and to an Irish Republic. Gordon, for instance, notes that while the Easter Rising marked Irish resistance to England, Beckett's uncle Howard was actually

serving the British in their military efforts against German forces on the continent (13). The implicit conflict here needs hardly to be stated, but Howard's service does suggest that the Beckett family's loyalties would lie with the British forces alongside which Beckett's uncle served rather than with those Irishmen and women fighting against those forces.⁶

The Beckett family's loyalties to Britain, however, likely stretched further than filial loyalty⁷ to a family member serving with British forces. As Anthony Cronin points out, Unionist and anti-Catholic tendencies were part and parcel of the specific Irish Protestant community and class in which Beckett grew up.⁸ In discussing these tendencies, though, Cronin is careful to distinguish the family from the Anglo-Irish class and to place them, more appropriately, within a Protestant *business* class. Cronin notes that unlike the Anglo-Irish, this business class "probably looked to England less often and with less social anxieties than did their landed co-religionists. They did not, for the most part, send their offspring to English schools or take their daughters to London for the season⁹ ..." (10). Yet despite these differences both were extremely conscious of religious differences between themselves and their Catholic neighbors. Indeed, Cronin points out that "[l]ike the aristocracy, the Protestant business community of the towns and cities looked down on Catholics as, in general, rather feckless, lazy and dishonest" (9). Cronin continues to observe that the goal of many of this business class was to remove themselves as far as possible from the Catholic majority amongst which they lived.

And turning specifically to Foxrock, the suburban community in which Beckett grew up, Cronin finds that this unfortunate tendency to scorn and avoid Catholics was also quite common. Cronin notes that "[i]t was a boast among the denizens of Foxrock ... that one could pass one's day without speaking to any Catholic other than the railway company's employees" (9). And considering this boast, it is quite likely that Beckett spent his early years sheltered from the vast majority of his Irish countrymen and countrywomen. Certainly, his community, class, and family all appear more than willing to shelter themselves—and, no doubt, their offspring—from *Catholic* Ireland and to insulate themselves instead in a Protestant Ireland in which, as Vivian

6. Beckett suggests that his uncle's military service was less than voluntary. "He was more or less pushed into it, blackmailed into it by the family. To join up" (S. Beckett qtd. in Knowlson 30).

7. The importance of filial loyalty, though, should not be ignored—particularly in the case of Beckett's uncle Howard. James Knowlson notes that "Beckett became quite fond of his uncle Howard, who played a distinctive role in developing some of the more intellectual of his nephew's interests when he was in his teens." One of these interests was chess, and Sam found a formidable opponent in his uncle. Knowlson adds, too, that "[m]any of [Beckett's] best moves were learned from Howard" (30).

8. Of Beckett's biographers, Cronin offers perhaps the most thorough and comprehensive discussion of the Beckett family's social standing. See *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* 3-11.

9. Of the Protestant business class, Cronin also notes that this class's interest in politics was less fevered than that of the Anglo-Irish: "They were content to vote Unionist and hope for the best" (10). And along with their less feverish concern with politics, "the outlook of the Protestant middle class was far more scrupulous, honest and industrious, less eccentric and also less centred on the Vice Regal Court in Dublin Castle with its multifarious snobberies and its petty pretensions" (10-11).

Mercier observes, "[i]f one preferred to think of oneself as English there was really no reason not to" (qtd. in Cronin 9).

Of course, we can only speculate about the extent to which the Becketts chose to envision themselves as English rather than Irish, but we can assume, with considerable assurance, that the family's loyalties were Unionist rather than Nationalist and that they would make clear-cut distinctions between themselves and their Catholic "neighbors." Yet as his family sheltered him from Catholic Ireland, they also sheltered Beckett from that Irish culture which would become central after the nation gained its independence. And in distancing themselves from Catholic Irish culture, the Becketts simultaneously marginalized themselves within the nation in which they would come to live. Unfortunately for Beckett and his class, no other national identities availed themselves either. As Cronin has noted, this Protestant business class did not have the connections in England that the Anglo-Irish had and, therefore, were no longer able to solace themselves, after 1922, with fantasies of being English. Additionally, the Becketts, along with many of their class, depended upon businesses established in *Ireland* for their survival and were consequently unable to consider relocation to England as viable.

For Beckett and his community, the result was a sense of living *between* worlds: too English (Protestant) to be Irish and too Irish to be English. Beckett, in fact, would seem to have discovered personally—after spending two years in London¹⁰—that he fit into English society as poorly as he fit into the provincial Irish culture he had grown to despise. Knowlson notes Beckett's hatred of London, citing in particular Beckett's fury at "the patronizing English habit of addressing him in the pubs and shops as 'Pat' or 'Paddy'" (179). And likewise, Deirdre Bair quotes Beckett as admitting: "I hated London ... everyone knew you were Irish—the taxi drivers called you 'Pat' or 'Mick'" (212). Additionally, Bair adds that Beckett

considered all the people in London as a collectively hostile mass to be encountered as seldom as possible. Ordering a meal in a restaurant, buying a newspaper or riding in a taxi were ordeals. He shrank from more sophisticated contact as well, and as time passed, he intensified his refusal to do anything to further his career by refusing to attend any social gathering where literary persons might be. (212)

Bair's commentary becomes particularly interesting as it describes Beckett's attempting to avoid the English in much the same way as his community worked to avoid Irish Catholics. Further, Beckett's refusal to join literary circles seems motivated as much by shame as by hatred of Londoners.

Of course, Bair may be overdramatizing Beckett's discomfort in London, but Beckett's unease with the "Irish" label while in London is difficult to dismiss. And this discomfort with being known as Irish would suggest that, indeed, while Beckett's social standing in Ireland estranged him not only from the Irish, it was inadequate to position him as truly English. And

10. Beckett's stay in London lasted from 1933 to 1935. His reasons for relocating to London were to try to establish himself as a writer and to undergo psychoanalysis.

Beckett's difficulty with national identity appears not unlike those difficulties his characters have in finding their own identities. Certainly, Beckett's conflict over identities could readily offer the germ for much of his work—particularly many of the works produced after the Second World War in what he called his “frenzy of writing” (qtd. in Knowlson 325).

Yet prior to this writing frenzy, the sensation of living between worlds seems also to have influenced Beckett's choice as to the kind of author he would be. Specifically, his inability to situate himself comfortably in either England or Ireland propelled Beckett into the role of cosmopolite, a role which he carefully nurtured from his first arrival in Paris¹¹ to near his death, when he decided to be buried in France rather than Ireland (Knowlson 618).¹² These efforts to recast himself as a cosmopolitan intellectual and writer also included mimicry of James Joyce's dress¹³ and, upon returning to Ireland, his refusal to discard his French clothing and beret in exchange for a more “Irish” wardrobe (Bair 115). And even Beckett's earliest writings attest to his efforts towards a cosmopolitan image. His first independent publication, the poem “Whoroscope,” is clearly imitative of Eliot's style in *The Waste Land*—particularly in Beckett's inclusion of notes in his own poem not unlike those Eliot added to *The Waste Land*. Likewise, Beckett's short story collection *More Pricks Than Kicks* and his first novel *Murphy* also show telltale signs of the author's cosmopolitan ambitions. Even as Harrington examines *More Pricks* in an Irish context, he admits into his discussion an early reviewer's charge that the stories reached more towards cosmopolitanism than Irishness (53). In fact, this reviewer, Norah Hoult, goes so far as to condemn the collection of stories as “a holiday for the highbrows” (qtd. in Harrington 65). *Murphy* also faced such charges. Harrington notes, for example, that the book “invites explication in terms of Continental philosophers” (88) and also observes later that both *Murphy* and *More Pricks* are suffused with recondite, High Modernist allusions—particularly to *continental* artists and thinkers (97).

Yet in addition to such allusions, Beckett's cosmopolitan aspirations are most clear in his stylistic imitations of his mentor, Joyce. Beckett's early works have long suffered comparisons with the works of Joyce, and critics

11. Beckett first arrived in Paris to serve as exchange *lecteur* at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1928 and returned to Ireland in 1930. Knowlson notes that living in Paris—and meeting James Joyce—was “a revelation to Beckett” (112) and suggests that Beckett first begins to envision himself as a writer while in Paris. Beckett's first model as a writer is, of course, Joyce, and, upon returning home, Beckett begins to cultivate an image of himself as a cosmopolite like Joyce. Particularly revealing is a letter to his close friend, Thomas MacGreevy, in which Beckett's efforts to convey himself as a cosmopolitan intellectual are (clumsily) obvious:

To-day I am sitting by the fire listening to the rain and the trees and feeling ideally stupid. I suppose I will read the Strand magazine until it is time for tea and then the Illustrated London News until it is time for dinner and then listen to Liebestraum and ... the TSF [French for wireless] until it is time for bed. (qtd. in Knowlson 123)

12. In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd offers a thorough discussion of the conflicting pressures often felt by the Irish writer to subscribe either to an art emphasizing nationality or cosmopolitanism. See Chapter Nine: “Nationality or Cosmopolitanism?” 155-65. Kiberd does not discuss Beckett's struggle over the type of art he would choose to produce but does mention a number of Irish role models—Wilde, Shaw, and Joyce—that Beckett might have looked to during his own deliberations.

13. This mimicry even included wearing pointed-toe patent leather pumps like Joyce's—and in the same size as Joyce's (Bair 71).

have long dismissed these early works specifically because of their imitative quality. The usual complaint is that the voice with which Beckett writes these early works is not yet his own, and Beckett does clearly appear to be borrowing a voice in these works. This borrowing, though, is not unrelated to his earlier physical mimicry of his cosmopolite role model, and both types of borrowing reveal Beckett as still searching for an identity to assume. Eventually, of course, Beckett does succeed in establishing his own identity as a member of the cosmopolite literati.¹⁴ However, this identity only comes after Beckett's celebrated revelation that "Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more ... I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding" (qtd. in Knowlson 319). Of this vision, Beckett also admits: "*Molloy* and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel" (qtd. in Knowlson 319). And what *Molloy* suggests is that Beckett still felt the strain of living between worlds. Though Beckett had by this time made his permanent residence in Paris, his work quietly gestures back to Ireland, to anti-nationalist sentiment for his island home, and to a sense of postcolonial marginalization within his birth nation.

MOLLOY APPEARS, at first glance, to be a text unhelpful to and even unwelcoming of postcolonial or (anti)nationalist readings. After all, Beckett seemingly makes no effort to offer an explicit setting and, hence, does little to encourage his readers to view either the land or the population of that land as in any way colonized or recovering from colonization. However, while the setting may appear nondescript, Molloy and Moran do offer enough information so that the reader might identify the setting as Ireland. First and foremost, the names these narrators give themselves¹⁵ offer explicit references to Ireland. And as Molloy offers speculation on the movements of A and C, he initiates a piecemeal disclosure of his location. As he ponders different possibilities of A and C's origins, one hypothesis is that one of the figures might come "from the other end of the island even" (11). This innocuous bit of information proves little in itself, but when paired with Molloy's (and later, Moran's) name as well as with other bits of information—such as the fact that "da, in my part of the world, means father" (17)—his mentioning that A and C are on an island allows the reader to point, with more and more certainty, to Ireland as the setting of Beckett's novel.

Yet these piecemeal references to Ireland do not end at this point. Rather, Moran and Molloy offer a series of references to Ireland throughout their narratives. Molloy, for instance, admits at one point that "Tears and Laughter, they are so much Gaelic to me" (37) while Moran mentions his bagpipes as a

14. No doubt, the Irish banning of his early works also contributed to Beckett's eventual arrival at a cosmopolitan literary identity.

15. I use the word "give" deliberately since identity appears problematic and fluid, with narrators assuming and discarding identities and names throughout the trilogy.

possible item for inclusion on his list of traveling necessities (126). And added to these more oblique references to the novel's Irish setting, these narrators also refer to "Irish" objects which they come across during their respective journeys. Molloy, for instance, mentions that the handle of his knife is "so-called genuine Irish horn" (45). And even the food which Moran eats—Irish stew (98)—is laden with suggestions of national identity.

Considering their reluctance to name explicitly and directly the country in which they live, Molloy and Moran's repeated references to Ireland suggest that their relationship with their homeland is—like Beckett's—ambiguous at best. Each narrator would seem simultaneously to conceal and to offer his country for the reader's consideration. And, perhaps, their acknowledgment and concealment of their homeland is the result of an ambivalence towards Ireland. Indeed, Molloy's ambivalence towards his homeland shows clearly in his complaints about and comparison of his nation's methods of education to those of the English:

And if I have always behaved like a pig, the fault lies not with me but with my superiors, who corrected me only on points of detail instead of showing me the essence of the system, after the manner of the great English schools.... For that would have allowed me, before parading in public certain habits such as the finger in the nose, the scratching of the balls, digital emunction and the peripatetic piss, to refer them to the first rules of a reasoned theory. (25)

Such complaints—offered while he is nevertheless determined to remain within this "region" (65-66)—underscore Molloy's dual desires to be both within his home nation and, simultaneously, an exile from his home. In fact, Harrington notes similar conflicting desires to be both home and away from home in Molloy and Moran and notes that "the antinomy of being away from home and being home was the definitive problem in Irish poetry" (148). Further, Harrington points to this ambivalence on the part of both Molloy and Moran as "fundamental ... to literary representations of colonialism and post-colonialism" (158). It is perhaps not unlikely that this same conflict which Harrington observes is also at work as Beckett's narrators attempt simultaneously to separate themselves from and associate themselves with the Irish nation over which they roam.¹⁶

Ironically, this inner conflict ties Beckett's Irishmen firmly to an Irish tradition of questioning national identity (even as Molloy and Moran might strive to absent themselves from their homeland). This tradition, as has often been noted, extends back to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, in which the Irish Captain Macmorris first questions, "What ish my nation?" (III.2.121). And Declan Kiberd offers an explanation for its continuation—for the people of Ireland in general and for Beckett in particular—even after Ireland's liberation from its colonial oppressor:

16. In his description of "the sense of confinement" and "the getaway" in "Recent Irish Poetry" (see epigraph), Beckett also seems aware that ambivalence towards home is an essential element in the Irish Revival "poem of poems."

This vignette¹⁷ has been cited as proof that Samuel Beckett, from the very outset, found himself estranged from the emerging Ireland, but in fact his experience would have been typical of the great majority of Dubliners in Easter Week. They had not voted for (or against) the forces which staged the Rising, just as they would not have a chance to vote for (or against) the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. Theirs was a history which seemed always to happen in their absence.... (530)

Kiberd describes Ireland's progress towards independence in terms quite similar to our previous speculations on Beckett's discomfort with his homeland. But surprisingly, Kiberd extends these feelings of discontent to *all* of Ireland's people and, consequently, his sketch of the Irish path towards freedom seems only slightly less imperialistic than Britain's prior acquisition of the island as a colony. In both cases, the people of Ireland found themselves subject to a political system that they did not enter into of their own free will. Rather than extricate itself from the colonial binary of imperialist and subjugated colonized, the Irish bid for independence seems to represent merely a switching of roles whereby Ireland's founders essentially "conquered" their own people.¹⁸ In short, the roles of colonizer and colonized were *both* internalized in the newborn Irish nation.

Particularly for an Irish Protestant such as Beckett, living through Ireland's liberation from British control would likely seem like a conquest. The Irish Protestant would suddenly become the marginal figure subjugated to an Other who is ostensibly of the same nation but, in fact, is not. And as in the Irish Republic (as seen through the Irish Protestant's perspective), the Ireland of Beckett's *Molloy* is one in which the Irish play the roles of both imperial power and colonial victim. Molloy's fear of *local* police makes this internalization of both roles obvious.¹⁹ He finds himself powerless in their hands, lacking the necessary papers to prove his identity; and when the police submit him to interrogation and he is unable to respond to their questions, potential abuse becomes a definite concern for Molloy:

I hasten to answer blindly, fearing perhaps lest my silence fan their anger to fury. I am full of fear, I have gone in fear all my life, in fear of blows ... they have only to be gentle. I mean refrain from hitting me, and I seldom fail to give satisfaction, in the long run. Now the sergeant, content to threaten me with a cylindrical ruler, was little by little rewarded for his pains. (22)

Yet the police are not the only source of (apparently) internal imperialism at work in *Molloy* and Moran's world. Moran offers an account of a religious

17. The vignette to which Kiberd refers is of the young Beckett's witnessing of the Easter Rising, with his father and brother, on a hill outside of Dublin. Kiberd describes the event as follows: "Towards the end of the week, Bill Beckett took both of his sons to the top of a local hill, from which the burning inner city could be clearly seen. He began to laugh like someone at a holiday fireworks display, but 'Sam was so deeply moved that he spoke of it with fear and horror more than sixty years later'" (530).

18. Lousse's unusual—and deeply ambivalent—description of national identity suggests that she views the Irish Republic for which her husband died in exactly these terms: "Thanks then to this poor man [Molloy] I have been spared a painful task, not to mention the expense which I am ill able to afford, having no other means of support than the pension of my dear departed, *fallen in defense of a country that called itself his and from which in his lifetime he never derived the smallest benefit, but only insults and vexations*" (33, emphasis added). Lousse portrays the nation in almost parasitic terms here, implying that her husband—and others, presumably—had little choice but to submit to becoming members of the republic.

19. Public distrust of the police and fear of political reprisals carried out by police forces both prior to and following Irish independence may offer added context for Molloy's confrontation with authorities and may go far in explaining his seemingly irrational fear while in custody.

manifestation of imperialistic control in the person of the verger whose “list of the faithful” compels obedient attendance at religious services (96). And Moran is, himself, a source of similar power, exercising—or attempting to exercise—absolute control over his entire household. Finally, the organization for which Moran works and which compels him (and, presumably, Molloy as well) to write is a continued threat. This organization, headed by Youdi, disrupts Moran’s life, and Moran obeys each of Youdi’s orders out of fear—until his return home.

Essentially, the portrait of Ireland which Molloy and then Moran paint—a portrait not inconceivable to the Irish Protestant—is one that seems little changed from the days of colonial control by the British. The clearest evidence of change rests in the fact that sources of imperialistic power are multiple and internal rather than singular and external—as typically appears to be the case in colonial situations. However, for Molloy and Moran, these powers are nevertheless to be resisted. And it is their resistance as well as their concurrent realization of their peripheral identities within Ireland which raises the possibility of a postcolonial reading of *Molloy*.

With the framework of imperialistic powers established, we can now examine Molloy and Moran’s growing realization of their place within imperialistic Irish structures and their methods of resisting domination—particularly from those who would control their narratives. And since most critics, beginning with Edith Kern, agree that the Moran narrative precedes Molloy’s narrative in the developmental sequence which results in Moran’s transforming into Molloy (39), Moran—initially obedient to Youdi—would appear to be the better starting point in examining the characters’ understanding of their identities as well as their levels and methods of resistance.

As Moran begins his narration, he appears deeply invested in and, for the most part, comfortable with his role in Youdi’s organization. His narration, in fact, suggests that he attempts to distance himself from the uncivilized world (the world not under Youdi’s dominion) and from the vulgarity of those like his servant Martha who do not fit comfortably into his isolated world. Further, Moran’s narration suggests also that he attempts to replicate the order he perceives in Youdi’s organization within his own home, and his displeasure over disruptions, such as Gaber’s arrival, to his ordered home is evident. In this particular instance, Gaber not only annoys Moran by arriving on a Sunday but increases Moran’s displeasure by having the “impertinence to come straight to where I was sitting” (93). Gaber’s visit, in fact, disrupts Moran’s whole day, including his regular attendance at Sunday religious services (which leaves Moran particularly upset). It is worth noting, here, that Moran—even in these early pages of his narration and even though he attempts to establish his own imperialistic authority in his home—offers subtle forms of resistance to Youdi’s authority. Moran receives Youdi’s messenger “frostily” (93) and offers a small protest against the necessity that he leave that day (95). Overall, though, Moran is a compliant operative at this point. He does accept the assignment, he does leave on the day specified by

Youdi, and he does bring his son (as Youdi demanded). Further, his reporting of these events leading up to his departure also serves to underscore Moran's obedience. The report is thorough and well written (with no lapses into the extended paragraphs that he will later use), and, most importantly, Moran's report also conforms to the specifications of an expected and appropriate genre: the detective story.

Moran's resistance to Youdi's imperialistic authority, though, begins to increase as he is confronted with the necessity of actually preparing for his mission. He admits that: "I wondered, suddenly rebellious, what compelled me to accept this commission" (105). Later, Moran goes even further, noting that "at times ... I came to doubt even the existence of Gaber himself. And if I had not sunk back into my darkness I might have gone to the extreme of conjuring away the chief too" (107). While there is some suggestion that Gaber and Youdi are figments of Moran's (and Molloy's) imagination, this momentary "conjuring away" of the whole of the organization controlling his life might just as likely signal Moran's nascent desire to remove himself from this central authority. Regardless, this moment of uncertainty serves as a prelude to many more such moments that become increasingly prominent as Moran's report nears its end. Moran's extended and pervasive doubting, in fact, makes his report of little value as the kind of factual record that an organization such as Youdi's—one that is hierarchically based and which places great importance upon factual accuracy and control—would presumably need.

This increased proclivity towards doubt, however, is exacerbated by Moran's increased desire to thwart his superiors. He attempts to do so through his report, exclaiming during one particularly rebellious moment: "He asked for a report, he'll get his report" (120-21). The sense of malice towards Youdi which Moran reveals suggests that—even at this point, while in preparation to depart—he intends to use his narrative as a tool of resistance against his superior's imperialistic control. And this is exactly what Moran does as he counters the first lines of his report ("It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" [92]) with the concluding sentences: "It was not midnight. It was not raining" (176), effectually obliterating any guarantee of accuracy anywhere in his report.

Christopher Ricks identifies similar contradictions to this one as examples of the Irish bull; however, this particular contradiction does not fit into this category. Rather, Moran's use of this contradiction is quite intentional: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (176). In the natural occurrence of bulls, the speaker is seemingly unaware of the contradiction which she or he speaks, and the hearer cannot be certain if the contradiction results from the speaker's wit or lack thereof. Here, Moran is aware of the contradiction and offers it almost as a challenge to his intended reader—presumably Youdi—and as a conscious violation of the genre in which he is supposed to be writing.

Interestingly, though, this conscious and challenging use of contradiction

throws into question not only Moran's entire narrative but also Molloy's earlier use of apparently unconscious contradictions—legitimate Irish bulls. Moran's example, in fact, opens up the question of whether Molloy is also conscious of his use of bulls. And according to Ricks, this uncertainty is the source of the bull's power (155) and is likely the reason for its increased use as the pliable and complicit Moran gives way to the subtly resistant Molloy.

Certainly, the frequency of bulls—along with the narrator's decreased mobility, his increasing aversion to civilization, and his growing disinterest in formal niceties (both in the social sphere and in his writing)—seems to suggest that a psychic transformation is underway. Along this transformation, Moran's initial dependence upon and attraction toward sources of order is replaced by Molloy's resistance to any ordering agent whether it should come in the form of brutal policeman, attractive caretaker (Lousse), or literary critic (the person marking his pages). Moran admits that he senses the early stages of this transformation as well as the nature of the identity (Molloy's) which threatens to overcome him: "... he came to me, at long intervals. Then I was nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain. Just the opposite of myself, in fact. And when I saw him disappear, his whole body a vociferation, I was almost sorry" (113). It is tempting, in light of Moran's description, to view Molloy as Moran's Other. Yet this is not quite the case. Moran and Molloy are *both* subjects of domination; they are *not* master and servant or colonizer and colonized. Accordingly, Moran's position can only be equated with that of the mimic man²⁰ in colonial society. Like the mimic man, he attempts to emulate his superiors' values in order to gain acceptance, and like the mimic man, he never arrives at a sense of complete belonging in Youdi's organization. In the end, his only choice is to forego his efforts and accept the fact that he is an outsider, an Other, Molloy. And Molloy, as Other, clearly conforms to a number of Irish stereotypes that the Irish would likely be quite unhappy acknowledging after Irish liberation but that here suggest that the Irish have replaced their former masters through their own efforts to marginalize those who do not fit within their narrow definitions of acceptability.²¹

Molloy, in fact, is not far removed from the stage Irishman²² in his apparent stupidity, love of drink (37), shabby clothing, and crass narration. Indeed, Beckett's characterization actually emphasizes the colonial subtext in *Molloy*

20. Jenny Sharpe's mimic man is a colonial subject who attempts to gain admission into the colonizer's class through imitation of the colonizer. Sharpe describes the mimic man as "a contradictory figure who simultaneously reinforces colonial authority and disturbs it" (140).

21. Among literary examples of this Irish tendency towards rejection and/or marginalization of those images of the Irish deemed unacceptable, the *Playboy* riots stand in the forefront. Yet the Censorship of Publications Act (1932) served a similar purpose since its goal was to exclude materials and subject matter which the Irish would supposedly deem inappropriate for themselves.

22. J.S. Bratton et al. describe the stage Irishman as having "the dishevelled appearance, the rags for dress and the shambling gait; the perpetual idiotic grin and the pose evocative at best of naive innocence, at worst of stupidity. For orb and sceptre, this King of Mistrule carries those emblems of iniquity, the keg and the shillelagh, implying a life torn between the rival attractions of booze and violence, an indulgence for which his failure in love provides the excuse" (63). For a thorough discussion of the stage Irishman, see "Staging the Irishman," Chapter Two of J.S. Bratton, Richard Allen Cave, Breandan Gregory, Heidi J. Holder, and Michael Pickering's *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage: 1790–1930* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1991) 62–128.

through this close approximation of the stage Irishman in the character of Molloy. And further underscoring Molloy's resemblance to the stage Irishman is his tendency to play the simpleton before figures of authority. Molloy's "performance" before figures of imperialistic authority is a simulation of the stage Irishman's response to superiors as well as a tactic of resisting authority figures by encouraging them to underrate the native's intelligence. Molloy offers numerous performances for such purposes. While in police custody Molloy feigns gratitude for the "filth" (24) he is offered by social workers so that he might be left alone. He sagely admits:

Against the charitable gesture there is no defense, that I know of. You sink your head, you put out your hands all trembling and twined together and you say, Thank you, thank you lady, thank you kind lady. To him who has nothing it is forbidden not to relish filth. (24)

Whether aware of the fact or not, Molloy has devised a defense against such attacks. The performance—which he emphasizes as such in his narrative—is a means, though perhaps imperfect, of gaining the peace he desires. Additionally, the performance has the added benefit of elevating the performer to a position superior to his audience; he is, after all, aware of the falsity of such performances while the social worker is not.

A similar aspect of performance also rests in Molloy's use of the Irish bull. With the bull, however, Molloy's target is his reader—specifically the reader who edits his writing. Molloy's use of the bull, in fact, is fairly close to Linda Hutcheon's description of postcolonial uses of irony. Both offer what Hutcheon calls "doubleness" (134), and this doubling is a means of challenging or de-scribing the marginalizing grand narratives which postcolonial theory works to disrupt. Ricks even comments on the fact that the bull's power arises because "it does not have the reciprocity all on one side—or the folly all on one side" but is, rather, "two-faced" (155); and because of this "two-faced" quality, Molloy's reader must constantly question whether he or she is in the presence of a performance or whether Molloy is as much of a simpleton as he sometimes appears.

However, Molloy's most powerful performance springs from his use of aesthetics as a weapon of resistance to imperialistic order. Indeed, as both Beckett and his stage Irishman Molloy raise the scatological to the level of art in *Molloy*, they challenge traditional, authoritative aesthetic ideals. Molloy, in fact, makes blatantly clear that he understands this scatological material to be a contribution to an aesthetic. He admits, after all, that he talks of such things because "'tis my muse would have it so" (79). And significantly, this comment also rings with an Irish accent, incorporating the quaint "'tis" as well as calling up the romantic images within which the Irish—particularly the poets of the Irish Revival—were accustomed to clothe themselves. The effect is that Molloy's scatological aesthetic becomes politicized, serving as a means of turning the vulgarity of the stage Irishman from a moment of comic victimization of the marginalized into a means of resistance to imperialistic powers.

Yet this is not the first time Beckett has used aesthetics as an expression of the colonial subject; David Lloyd finds a similar confluence of the scatological and the colonial in *First Love*, and Lloyd probes this aesthetic challenge even deeper, asserting that this aesthetic form (the narrator's "excremental vision") implies "a radical negation of the aesthetic that has been for a period a principal agent in the formation of ethical subjects" (72). By negating the ideals of the aesthete who marks his papers, Molloy is able to neutralize his authority; and likewise, Beckett is able to resist those authorities by rendering their aesthetic visions, at best, merely subjective and devoid of any manner of Truth with which an imperialistic authority might justify her or his domination, literary or otherwise.

Such efforts towards resistance, of course, signal the narrators' arrival at a realization of their position as marginalized figures in the Irish cultural landscape. And indeed, Moran and Molloy's resistance to the forms of imperialistic authority they encounter would appear to place them at odds with this landscape; yet, in actuality, *Molloy* charts a journey not only towards the margins but—through the characters' resistance to this marginalization—back towards the center also. As with any postcolonial work, Moran and Molloy's narratives (and Beckett's text, as well) do not *reject* the imperial power through their resistance. Rather, they allow this imperial adversary to remain central while their actual efforts are to undermine its authority. It is for this reason that the postcolonial work often appears suspended between a desire to embrace the colonial's future (as a liberated citizen of his or her own nation) and an inability to let go of the past; in *Molloy*, these dual inclinations finally result in the work's overarching ambiguity towards an imperialistic Irish power which, ironically, is also the nation hard won from British hands, and it is this ambiguity which finally and conclusively validates Beckett's novel as a postcolonial text.

STEPPING BACK FROM our analysis of Beckett's text, we might point to numerous similarities between Beckett's early struggles with national identity and those of Moran and Molloy. In both his life and his work, Beckett offers the same model of expulsion and then searching for reintegration. This is the pattern Lloyd finds in *First Love*, it is Beckett's own experience of estrangement from his homeland, and it is the experience which transforms Moran into Molloy. And though perhaps not surprising, each case also incorporates moments of anti-nationalist sentiment towards Ireland and a subsequent refusal to live according to the constraints that Irish nationalism attempts to impose. For Beckett, this resistance consisted of his self-imposed exile from both his homeland and his native language as well as his refusal to capitulate to the demands that Irish censors made upon his work. Likewise for Moran and Molloy, resistance also takes the form of adopting a role unacceptable to the Irish nationalist: that of stage Irishman. Moran and Molloy's performance of the stage Irishman's role is an ugly reminder to the Irish not only of what

they endured but also of what their marginalizing efforts have done to some of their own fellow countrymen and women.

Yet Beckett's use of the stage Irishman type as a means of resistance to Irish cultural imperialism in *Molloy* might also suggest something about his own self-perception. Beckett seemed to view the Irish figure as one of resistance; and since he was also resisting Irish cultural imperialism, one might suspect that—despite his frequent use of French rather than English in his works and despite his residence in Paris rather than Dublin—Beckett still viewed himself as an Irish rather than French writer.²³ Certainly, Beckett appeared always to have sought the same "poem of poems" as the Irish Revival poets he mocked early in life: his was always an art that sought to "embrace the sense of confinement, the getaway, the vicissitudes of the road, [and especially] the wan bliss of the rim."

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23. Though Beckett sometimes wavered between loyalty to France and Ireland—as he did when forced to decide upon national representatives at Nobel Prize ceremonies—he nevertheless retained an up-to-date Irish passport throughout his life and died an Irish citizen.

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