LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Beckett's Manywheres

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Abstract
Samuel Beckett's writing often seems curiously placeless. Existing scholarship connecting his work to specific places has largely focused on the Ireland he knew in childhood and youth. In this article, Jeff Malpas's philosophical topology is tested as a means of getting to grips with the elusive role of place in Beckett. *Murphy* (1938) is loaded with toponyms, especially in its presentation of London. These enable the novel to function as a piece of slum naturalism but they also contribute to an alienating sense of placelessness. Additionally, *Murphy* contains enclosed spaces deliberately isolated from their surroundings, which seem to have no environment or even position. Beckett's post-war fiction, for example *Molloy*, largely dispenses with either realist or surrealist use of toponyms, but like *Murphy* also evokes actual landscapes to which Beckett had emotional and remembered links. His post-war drama, including *Endgame*, accentuates the bareness that seems to connote placelessness. Yet *Endgame* is multiply located and its 'manywheres' can be traced: regions to be found in atlases; the idea of nowhere; the space inside the head; possible worlds and imaginary worlds. The developing field of literary geography needs to take account of the complex multiple relationships between place and placelessness apparent in writing produced throughout Beckett's career. Malpas's philosophy of place begins to establish a typology of notions such as ground, unity and limit which could be used in such an analysis.

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Introduction: Placed and Unplaced Writing?

Since the cultural turn of the 1990s, literary geography has become an established subfield of social and cultural geography. Its focus, to quote Marc Brosseau, is on 'teasing out the multiple intersections between people and places, identity and territory, and spatial practices and cultural discourses' (2009: 212). In the same period, literary scholars have shown as much interest in developing new geographical approaches (e.g. Cooper and Gregory 2011; Moretti 1997; Moretti 2005; Moretti 2013; Thacker 2003; Westphal 2007). Within this body of work, discussion has begun of writing that seems, in Brosseau's words, 'ageographical' (2008: 381). This article seeks to build on such work, examining a writer who could seem an extreme example of literary placelessness: Samuel Beckett. Peter Boxall, indeed, speaks of 'the traditional critical insistence on the universality of Beckett's placelessness' (2010: 160). Paul Saunders (2011) has read Beckett's *Trilogy* as a concerted effort at negating treatments of place, chiefly in realist writing, which handles it as an enveloping human environment capable of being described. And several of Beckett's later works seem close to being examples of literature without a setting in place or time. James Knowlson, Beckett's biographer, writes of these as follows:

> *Imagination morte imaginez* (Imagination Dead Imagine) (1965) is set in a white rotunda in which two figures exist like embryos waiting for birth or extinction. In Le dépeupleur (The Lost Ones) (1971) a larger cylinder is inhabited by 200 people who live out a strictly regulated Dantesque existence. Bing (Ping in English) (1966) features a single figure in a small white cube. These works come very close to being formalist constructs, creating alternative worlds. Yet the texts are powerful as well as enigmatic and, in spite of all appearances, they do draw from and reflect on the 'real' world. What remains of consciousness in a world where all is reduced? (Knowlson 2004: 723)

Knowlson's account of these writings by Beckett points towards a key crux in locational thinking, the question of whether the place-world of human experience should be understood as single or multiple. Do we all live in individual spheres, or are we all attempting to describe and understand a world that is fundamentally shared when we write and read?

In recent scholarship, as Boxall points out, the 'universal, placeless surface' or 'blank face' of Beckett's writing is brought face to face with a submerged connection to place, to homelands (2010: 160). So far, this acknowledgement of Beckett's relationship to place has largely concentrated on Ireland, despite the fact that Beckett spent the vast majority of his writing career outside Ireland. It takes its cue from O'Brien's *The Beckett Country* (1986), a large-format book in which sparse biographical text surrounds black-and-white photographic images of urban, suburban and rural scenes in Dublin and environs, and is developed in recent scholarship (e.g. Kennedy 2010; Morin 2009). Russell Smith, for instance, outlines 'some of the strategies by which Beckett reworked autobiographical material in his writing'

(2013: 2), autobiography for Smith being closely associated with Beckett's memories in adulthood of his early childhood in the suburbs of Dublin. The present article aims to move discussion of the located qualities of Beckett's writing beyond Ireland. It does so within a poetics of place inspired by human geographers and philosophers who, since the 1990s, have reshaped the concept, removing its associations with fixity and various sorts of conservatism. Notable among these theorists are Doreen Massey, who grasps place as something not tied to 'coherent and homogenous' identities but 'outward-looking' in an era of the 'fragmentation and disruption' brought about by 'time-space compression' (1994: 146-7), and Tim Cresswell (2006), who has examined the place identities associated with varied examples of human mobility. Equally helpful are the philosophers Jeff Malpas and Edward Casey. The latter suggests that interactions between the human body and a newly polymorphous understanding of place be investigated in work towards a place philosophy (Casey 1997: 330-40). The place philosophy of Cresswell and more especially Malpas suggests ways of getting to grips with the specific dichotomies between inner and outer worlds, or place and its negation, that are apparent in Beckett's work. In the light of these conceptions of place, Beckett's writing can be reassessed: not as the work of a displaced, alienated urban modernist but as more generally human, for his texts connect with those of far less obviously modernist contemporaries.

Malpas develops the concentration on place found in later essays and lectures by Martin Heidegger. In his formulation:

> Place refers us, first, to that underlying structure of placedness that is essential to our being as human. This underlying, one might say, ontological, structure, although properly topological, is everywhere instantiated differently, and yet everywhere is the same. (Malpas 2012: 63)

We are always placed, Malpas argues, and moreover 'the placed character of our own being […] is worked out through the specific places in which we live and move' (2012: 63). Against notions that 'place' means especially the more rooted, rural attachments to certain sites frequently associated with the pre-modern past, he asserts that 'there is no privileged place in which placedness—or being—is made pre-eminently apparent' (Malpas 2012: 64. This point proves important in Malpas's defence of Heideggerian place thinking against the charge that it entails conservative or even fascistic politics and in the appreciative comparison he draws between Heidegger, associated with rural settledness, and Walter Benjamin, known for his writings on the ever-changing particularities of the modern city (2012: 137-57; 226-35). In his earlier writing on the philosophy of place, Malpas (1999) draws on the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth and on Proust's modernist fictions of memory to make the case that literature is vital for the understanding of human placedness, since it records the depth and richness of human place experience better than any other sort of writing.

More recently, however, Malpas has speculated that 'some places are perhaps better attuned to enabling' the appreciation of human placedness than others (Malpas 2012: 64). So, although Malpas's notion of topology has much potential for application in literary studies, it *does* – residually, and almost against the philosopher's will – treat one sort of placed human identity as the default or proper sort. This is the deep or intimate or longstanding, rather than the shallow, casual or fleeting encounters with multiple somewheres which we all have every day in the contemporary world. The study of apparently placeless writings like Beckett's calls attention to problems with Malpas's philosophy of place, as well as demonstrating its usefulness for literary geographers.

C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski argue that Beckett's career should be understood as a shift 'from stories of motion (quests, wilderness journeys, joyous outgoing and sad return, coming and going, home and asylum, "on" as a goad) to narratives of stillness or imperceptible movement, of closed space' (2004: 385). This is to read Beckett's career in spatial terms. In such a reading of Beckett a conflict emerges between space, as a conceptual quality of the material universe in the manner charted by Descartes, and place, as part of the texture of everyday experience in the way that it is understood by Malpas and Casey. The encyclopaedia (or gazetteer) format of Ackerley and Gontarski's *Companion* to Beckett perhaps encourages its authors to take more account of Beckettian location as a central aspect of his writing than most Beckett scholars do. Alongside philosophical conceptualisation of spatial motion there is the question of locale, or setting, of 'the Beckett country' as a 'psychological landscape, not unlike "Greeneland," replete with bicycles, dogs, dustbins, and destitutes in hats, greatcoats, and ill-fitting boots', but also 'grounded in SB's boyhood Dublin, its mountains, forests, swamps and coast' (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004: 41).

Earlier Beckett criticism typically underplayed the real place aspects of his work. For instance, the 15th arrondissement of Paris, where the writer lived, 'pervades' Beckett's post-war writings, but this was largely passed over by Beckett's earlier readers (however, see Fletcher 1965: 184). And, with a handful of exceptions (Lassman and Byron 2010; Saunders 2011), there continues to be little consideration of the complex interaction between real and invented place in Beckett work, even in publications such as the *Journal of Beckett Studies*. But, as Ackerley and Gontarski observe, '[t]he *Unnamable*'s world is the Rue Brancion, opposite the former shambles, with its statue to the "hippophagist," Ducroix', and although 'the particulars of Paris decline in the later work, those that appear are the more salient' (2004: 426-7). The inability of critics to grasp connections such as these was fuelled by the fact that the decades in which Beckett became famous, the 1950s and 1960s, were those in which, as Ackerley and Gontarski put it, in their entry for 'Biography', 'the text was expected to speak for itself' (2004: 59). But the gazetteer approach, too, has its risks, since it can make textual sites seem more identical with real-world ones than they actually are. Since the 1990s, following biographies by Knowlson (1996) and Anthony Cronin (1996), there have been more locational readings of Beckett, including several recent assessments of the place of

France in his work (e.g Travis 2008; Ullmann 2013). However, such readings need to move beyond the chronological 'exposition' of Beckett's movements in Ireland, London and France offered by Charles Travis (2008: 74) as if it were a straightforward explanation of the changes in approach to place found in Beckett's writings between the late 1920s and the early 1950s.

London Toponyms in *Murphy*: A Board-Game World

Following the Heideggerian paths indicated by Malpas leads to the discovery of qualities in Beckett we would be unlikely to find otherwise. For instance, via Beckett's experimental but very identifiably placed and referential debut novel *Murphy* (1938), the placed quality, the being-in-place of Beckett's seemingly unplaced or anti-place later work, can be revealed. The toponymic aspects of *Murphy* themselves remain under-studied.

Murphy tells the story of a young, bohemian Irishman wandering through Depression-era London, and of his encounters with others. These often take the form of pursuits or contests. Murphy leaves London for an asylum, as a worker not a patient, and eventually is killed accidentally in a gas explosion, his death misinterpreted by others as a suicide. He is understood by his colleagues as 'the male nurse that went mad with his colours nailed to the mast' (148-9). This brief plot summary does not capture the quality of the book, which has a frenzied precision and game-like quality anticipatory of writings by Borges and Fowles that would appear later in the century and be described as postmodern. It is a novel which may appear 'undemanding' (Rabinovitz 1986: 67) compared with Beckett's later work, but which is structured by hidden patterns of repetition, duality and multiplicity. *Murphy* has been overshadowed by Beckett's post-war writings, which are, locationally speaking, radically different from it. For *Murphy* is richly toponymic and filled with detailed allusions to specific places that can be found in maps, almanacs or on bus timetables. But through a reading of *Murphy* it is possible to recover or re-identify the placed quality, the being-in-place, of Beckett's later writing. As well as its wealth of toponyms, *Murphy* also contains the seeds of an approach to location that could be classed as anti-place or unplaced.

The toponyms of *Murphy* are above all those of streets and districts within London. These begin, in the first sentence of the novel, with the 'mew in West Brompton' (3) where Murphy initially lodges, and end in Hyde Park, 'between the Round Pond and the Broad Walk' (166). Such toponyms are laid out by Beckett during the moves across the map of the city indicated in this novel by walks, bus and tube journeys and taxi rides (e.g. 75, 91, 93). One such passage describes a rush-hour journey on a 'nice number eleven' bus from terminus to terminus and back 'through the evening rush', which is undertaken as a leisure activity and is thus a subversion of the functional purpose of urban bus routes to take people to and from work (59) (see Ackerley 2010: 107). In the terms of geographers such as Cresswell (2006), these moves exemplify the mobile variations of human life in a twentieth-century urban environment characterized by space-time compression.

In *Murphy*, Beckett deals out the addresses and atmospheres of different zones in an offhand way, beginning with the 'West Brompton' of the novel's first sentence, and continuing with a group of street and bridge names in Chapter 2: 'Edith Grove', 'Cremorne Road', 'Lot's Road', 'Stadium Street', 'Regent Street', 'about halfway between the Battersea and Albert Bridges' (3; 11; 12). None of these sites have their situation on the map of London spelled out for the reader: London itself is not actually named until Chapter 3 (19). Beckett also draws on many quirky or dispiriting minor details of the insalubrious area of inner north London around Brewery Road, 'between Pentonville Prison and the Metropolitan Cattle Market', on 'the heights of Islington' (41), including 'the pimple of Market Road Gardens opposite the Tripe Factory' where 'Murphy loved to sit ensconced between the perfume of disinfectants from Milton house immediately to the south and the stench of stalled cattle from the corral immediately to the west' (47) (see Ackerley 2010: 82-3; 90-2). These details represent more than the 'backdrop' that Travis argues they constitute (2008: 84). The effect is surrealist rather than realist, to make details stand out in their oddity, as themselves, incidentally also revealing the sex and death drives of human psychology.

On the whole, Beckett's novel is sharply accurate about details and relative positionings. This contrasts with the treatment of London to be found in *Guignol's Band* (1944) by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, an associate of Beckett's on the 1930s Parisian literary scene. In Céline's text, London place names are toyed with and mixed up by a fiercely slapdash narrator: '[…] another stretch of hovels … Hollyborn Street … Falmouth Cottage … Hollander Place … Bread Avenue!'; 'Forward! … Tottenham … the Strand … and the East streets', where 'Hollyborn' recalls Holborn and 'Tottenham' is probably Tottenham Court Road, not Tottenham at all (Céline 2012: 24; 72). Beckett and Céline both question stable and reliably toponymic views of the city. But where Céline works by modifying and conflating toponyms, Beckett instead juxtaposes the named streets and districts of London with internal spaces, notably those of rented rooms, which can come to resemble the inside of a mind or skull, or the whole universe.

Scholars have used Beckett's engagement with the rationalist philosophy of Descartes and others to understand this locational juxtaposition of big world and small world in the London of *Murphy* as part of a general dualism, in which the interior space or little world of the mind becomes opposed to the big world of motion (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004: 321-2). The little world appears in *Murphy*, Ackerley and Gontarski argue, in settings like the mental hospital (and within it two particular rooms, the garret and the padded cell) and the chess board. The London rooming house or bedsit house in *Murphy* is something of a bridge or borderline between big world and little world, while the mental hospital is itself understood by at least one scholar (Rabinovitz 1986) as lying on the frontier between the two.

In terms of referentiality or indexicality (Levinson 2004), there are two levels of identifiable place in *Murphy*, one outside and one within London (cf. Rabinowitz 1986: 77; 81). Central to the outside-London level is the train and boat route 'from Euston to

Holyhead, […] from Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire' (74). On the same route, beyond Dublin there is Cork, from whence Murphy has come to London (4), and beyond London Paris. This spatial-deictic level can thus be identified as a line running Cork—Dublin—London—Paris. Paris appears in Murphy's recalled experience, and therefore as a combination of the little world of mind and the big world of motion. Consequently, following the narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan, Murphy's Paris could be understood as inside his London, since one is narrated from within the other (Hones 2011: 687; 695). Trudging up the scruffy Caledonian Road in London towards his lodgings, he remembers being in Paris and 'the toil from St Lazare up Rue d'Amsterdam' there (47) (see Ackerley 2010: 90). This non-London level of the internal landscape of *Murphy* is essentially linear, in the terms of the span Cork—Dublin—London—Paris, although there are moments when it flashes up elsewhere, such as when Murphy remembers 'a garret in Hanover' he once occupied when he moves into a similar room at the mental hospital, the Magdalen Mental Mercy Seat (or MMM) (98).

In *Murphy*, the locational level containing sites within London is considerably richer and more multiple than the Cork—Dublin—London—Paris line that largely stands for the world outside London here (see Ackerley 2010: 26-7). The level within London resembles the board of a game, on which the characters move around like counters. As such, it finds an echo or repetition in the night-time chess game Murphy plays in the mental hospital with an inmate, all of whose moves appear in the text of *Murphy*, so that it could be reproduced (145-6). The first encounter between Murphy and his prostitute girlfriend Celia provides an example of how Beckett draws upon his knowledge of London's topography in the novel. The setting is the Lots Road area, in the 1930s one of London's zones of lodging houses filled with temporary sojourners but also decayed and declined people who stayed for decades (Beckett himself lodged in the Lots Road area in 1934-5):

> It was on the street, the previous midsummer's night, the sun being then in the Crab, that she met Murphy. She had turned out of Edith Grove into Cremorne Road, intending to refresh herself with a smell of the Reach and then return by Lot's Road, when chancing to glance to her right she saw, motionless in the mouth of Stadium Street, considering alternately the sky and a sheet of paper, a man. Murphy. (10-11)

Lots Road lies on the Chelsea side of the border between the Chelsea and Fulham districts – formerly civil parishes, later metropolitan boroughs – on the Thames to the south-west of central London. For much of the twentieth century Chelsea was gentrifying, fashionable and artistic; Fulham merely shabby and overcrowded. Like its partner, Brewery Road in Islington, where Murphy also lodges, Lots Road was surrounded by noxious and smoke-generating industries, notably brewing, gravel extraction and its power station, built near Chelsea Creek ('the Reach') to supply electricity to the London Underground (Croot 2004: 12; 91; 156). The streets, in the marginal zone surrounded by waters known as Sandy End (Croot 2004: 63-4), can be found in the London *A-Z* atlas.

The game-like aspect of *Murphy* coexists with the slum naturalism also present in the novel's representations of Lots Road, West Brompton, and Brewery Road, Islington. In *Murphy*, as in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Beckett's topographical and toponymic precision does something other than bolster verisimilitude. Beckett's youthful reading of Joyce, in the 1929 essay 'Dante … Bruno. Vico … Joyce', insisted that in Joyce, words are themselves as well as and perhaps over and above being referential counters, which is to say markers for something else: 'His writing is not *about* something; it is that *something itself*' (Beckett 1983: 27). In *Murphy*, toponyms are something more than mere components of scene-setting background, as the earlier efforts in literary geography described by Hones (2011) tended to interpret place reference in fiction. They are far more: they are a crucial aspect of the texture of his writing about place, a manifestation of his drive towards what his character Mr Willoughby Kelly calls the 'beastly circumstantial' (11).

The Madhouse of *Murphy*: Anti-Place Re-Placed

As a concept, place denotes something positive. To consider human existence as fundamentally placed is to relate human beings to one another and to a knowable external world, whether place is conceived in terms of the multiple unity of Malpas (2012), the ever-shifting contests of Massey (1994), or the more static, rooted existence associated with the word by Relph (1976).

And yet some locational or spatial zones can function as anti-places. A room is an anti-place if it becomes a stand-in for the whole world, a reduction of the world to the seeming boundaries of four walls. Everyone's world of existence has certain unconsidered limits, which can define the meaning of that existence or act more negatively (Malpas 2012: 73-95). At the opening of *Murphy* the protagonist wants his own world to be like this: confined to a room, the bigger world shut out, or at least curtained out. As far as possible, Murphy creates in his West Brompton room an environment that is completely dark and in which he experiences no sensations, thereby attempting to remove himself from bodily engagement with his surroundings:

> The corner in which he sat was curtained off from the sun, the poor old sun in the Virgin again for the billionth time. Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to his rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. Sweat poured off him, tightening the thongs. The breath was not perceptible. (2)

Murphy's binding of himself anticipates later Beckettian literary practice with its establishment of limited worlds. It also connects with Beckett's own claim to carry around with him a memory of life in the womb (Cronin 1996: 2). Like the unborn foetus, Murphy is fated to be expelled from his bounded space, but in ways that are linked not so much to the human universality of gestation and birth as to the mundane particularity of municipal

housing policy. The house where Murphy lodges has been 'condemned', which is to say declared a slum, unfit for human habitation, by local government authorities, and scheduled for demolition.

When it comes to anti-place, the padded cells or 'quiet rooms' (101) of the MMM represent an extreme example of a situation in which an inhabitant, patient or prisoner is isolated 'like a monad' (which is the room *and* its inhabitant) from the context and surroundings of the outside world (109). But there are other sites in *Murphy* which have their placed qualities stripped away from them. An example is a room in the Brewery Road lodging house where Murphy and Celia stay. This room is inhabited by an elderly man referred to by Murphy as 'the old boy'. He is heard by them ceaselessly pacing the room, which he never leaves, as he has done for who knows how long beforehand. Ultimately, he kills himself in the room, slitting his throat with a razor (81-3). Celia then moves into the room and is heard there pacing as 'the old boy' formerly did, in a further instance of the repetitions Rabinovitz notes (1986: 74).

Imprisonment entails restrictions on mobility, usually imposed from outside, but potentially also by the self. It is also a confinement to one point on the earth's surface that at once becomes a whole locational world and also, experientially, loses its position in terms of the earth's co-ordinates for the one incarcerated there. The imprisoned person is more bounded by four walls than is the person who could be understood as economically or psychologically trapped (cf. Brosseau 2008). Alongside the self-imposed imprisonment of the 'old boy' goes Murphy's voluntary confinement of himself, binding himself to a chair in his room in the condemned building at West Brompton (3). But even anti-place moves can be placed. Murphy, who ties himself up in the West Brompton room then moves to another rented room in another malodorous social district, could be read in social terms as a denizen of a particular locational zone, that of the London house let out in rooms in the post-Victorian decades. Celia and 'the old boy' inhabit this socio-economic zone too.

In fact, the images of the figure self-bound in a chair, the old man alone in his room heading for suicide, of the mental hospital – and within that the padded cell – brought together by Murphy himself as a clash between 'the big world and the little world, decided by the patients in favour of the latter, revived by the psychiatrists on behalf of the former, in his own case unresolved' (*M*: 107), could be understood in terms of a *scaled* notion of place rather than via an *opposition* between place (outside, big) and anti-place (inside, small). In such a reading, the big world – the outside world believed in by those who run not only hospitals but also shops – and the little world of mind, room, chair and bed are actually connected. Murphy's tragedy, if such it can be called, is his inability to recognise the connection: his urge to pretend to be alone and immobile is his undoing, leading as it does to his absurd death.

Regions of 'Nameless Things'

Beckett claimed that his decision to write in French instead of his native English allowed him at last 'to write the things I feel' (Knowlson 1996: 319; cf. Travis 2008: 78). He took the

decision immediately after the Second World War. Following this decision came the run of fictional and dramatic writings which turned him from an outsider on the fringes of the Paris avant-garde into one of the central figures in the literature of the twentieth century. Beckett's pre-war writings abound in place names, but their post-war successors become, over time, almost entirely stripped of toponyms. An early poem such as 'Enueg I', for instance, has a setting clearly identifiable as Dublin. The identification is made possible by toponyms: 'the Portobello Private Nursing Home', 'Parnell Bridge', 'the hill down from the Fox and Geese into Chapelizod', 'Kilmainham', 'The Liffey' (Beckett 2006: IV.11-13). As such, when 'a little wearish old man' is identified as Democritus, this seems a sort of simile: he resembled Democritus but in fact was an ordinary old Irishman.

By contrast, when Beckett's post-war writings talk about places, they most often do so in a way that seems to dispense not only with toponyms but with naming *per se*. In *Molloy* (1955), for instance, the wandering protagonist recounts his movements from his 'mother's room' (3) to a view of 'a road remarkably bare […] without hedges or ditches or any kind of edge, in the country' (4). 'The town' said to be 'not far' from here (5) is perhaps the same one mentioned a little later, near one of whose entrances and exits, 'narrow and darkened by enormous vaults', he is afterwards apprehended by the police for some unspecified misdemeanour (16). *Molloy* contains personal names, some with real-world place attachments, and yet these are always threatened by collapse into, in the words of Molloy himself, 'no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names' (26). As with *Murphy*, the single word that is both the title of the book and the name of its protagonist is identifiably Irish, and Jacques Moran, the 'agent' later set on Molloy's trail has a confusingly similar and equally Irish surname. All three names, 'Moran', 'Molloy' and 'Murphy' are more obviously Irish than 'Beckett'.

Few if any toponyms straightforwardly referencing placenames to be found in the atlas appear in *Molloy*, leaving the possibility open for scholars to argue that that home life of the explicitly Catholic Moran, Molloy's pursuer in Part II, functions as 'a hidden shell of [Protestant] Anglo-Ireland' (Jeffers 2009: 82) in the novel. Molloy's life is eventually revealed as having been spent in a 'region' called 'Ballyba', comprising the 'market-town, or village' and its surroundings, a 'commune, or a canton' (128). In Molloy's own account, during Part I, the settlement and its surroundings are a city of uncertain but seemingly large extent; for Moran, they are something much smaller. Beckett's *Molloy* thus encodes a pervasive sense of spatial uncertainty.

In *Molloy*, the landscape on the fringes of Dublin visible to Beckett in childhood, his most intimately-known landscape, gets a treatment that goes further into depth and has more feeling bound into it than the treatment of London in *Murphy*. Here, place is handled via the deferral or erasure rather than the advancement and display of toponyms. Ballyba, which Molloy knows and equally does not know, is understood by him as a 'region' (60). This is a term human geographers have been familiar with since the inception of their discipline, and which still remains important to them today, if sometimes as a concept to

revolt against (Crang 1998: 15-31; Entrikin 2008). For Molloy, a deep uncertainty attaches to this term:

> I fail to see, never having left my region, what right I have to speak of its characteristics. No, I never escaped, and even the limits of my region were unknown to me. But I felt they were far away. But this feeling was based on nothing serious, it was a simple feeling. For if my region had ended no further than my feet could carry me, surely I would have felt it changing slowly. For regions do not suddenly end, as far as I know, but gradually merge into one another. (60)

The region is at once capable of being marked out on a map (although one region tends to 'gradually merge' into another, rather than being rigidly demarcated), and something that a person carries around with them, an aspect of the lived body. Molloy appears at once the opposite of a masterly geographer, an utterly unreliable guide – he is unable even to remember the name of his native town, in whose environs he says he has spent his entire life (26-7) – and a universal human figure, resembling everyone who drags their body only as far as their feet can carry them, until they die.

Turning the Telescope on the Without: The 'Manywheres' of *Endgame*

Turning to drama, Beckett's post-Second World War plays have reached a large audience precisely by taking as their strongly visualized stage world the polar opposite of the crowded realist or naturalist stage setting of his predecessors, including two who, like Beckett, emerged from Dublin's Protestant community: Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. The stage sets Beckett insisted upon for plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are strikingly bare. They lack locational markers of the sort present in most late nineteenth-century writing, including the plays of Wilde and Shaw. Shaw's plays, in particular, are highly toponymic in a referential sense: in them, particular districts, streets and even buildings are indicated by name and given characteristics such that their audiences are asked to identify what is marked by a certain toponyms within the fiction with what is marked by the same toponyms in the non-textual world. In *The Philanderer* (1893), Shaw's first stage direction locates the action at 'a flat on Ashley Gardens in the Victoria district of London' (1922: 73). The details of its appearance on stage claim to convey how a wealthy, artistically-minded bachelor's London flat in the 1890s would have looked, including 'theatrical engravings and photographs' on the wall and the 'small round table' with 'a yellow-backed French novel lying open on it' (Shaw 1922: 73). The visual contrast between Shaw and Beckett for the theatre audience could hardly be greater. *Waiting for Godot* begins with the stage direction '*A country road. A tree. Evening*' (Beckett 1986: 11). *Endgame* starts with something still blanker: the opening stage direction of the play is '*Bare interior. / Grey light.*' (Beckett 1986: 92).

Consequently, Beckett's writing poses a challenge to literary geographers, who, on the whole, turn towards the sort of writing that is explicitly placed, and which draws its core

feelings about human existence from the encounter with place. The poetry of Wordsworth or the fiction of Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner are thus key reference points in existing literary topographies (Malpas 1999; Miller 1995). And as Sheila Hones (2011) points out, earlier efforts at literary geography perhaps paid excessive attention to writing that is highly referential in the sense of containing long, scene-setting descriptive passages which seem to correlate with places in the real world.

Yet all writing, literary and not, indicates the world and positions its readers – and, implicitly, its producers – in relation to different portions of it: all writing has a deictic aspect (Green 1995; Levinson 2004). Beckett's writing shares this relationship to geography with highly toponymic – or metonymic – fiction, or the poetry of place. Where the topographies of 'realist' or 'naturalist' fiction have commonly been taken at face-value as pieces of naïve indexicality, those found in modernist novels like Beckett's *Murphy* or *Molloy* have conversely been taken as dimensions of artistic experimentation and not what they also are: indexical gestures and pieces of documentary historical evidence about particular places at particular times. When 'the great English schools' are alluded to in *Molloy* (21), something multiple is put into place, since the action of the novel is not clearly located on the map of the globe that also includes England. Instead, one world seems to appear in another, with the possibility lurking that Beckett's characters are experiencing the world that we experience, just in a radically imperfect or simply different way. Beckett's post-war writing, then, denies easy associations with specific place referents, but is not without these associations. It emphasizes particular complexities and multiplicities in human place experience of which literary geography needs to take account.

As discussed above, the highly placed and topographic *Murphy* contains important anti-place elements. These can be detected both in Murphy's treatment of himself, and in the imminent obliteration of his personal places in West Brompton: 'the corner in which he sat' and the room's aspect will alike vanish into the rubble when the building is demolished (2). Conversely, the apparently anti-place, stripped-back world of *Endgame* could be reread within a realist paradigm as actually happening somewhere, but with the spatial setting reckoned as unknown to the characters, or as a devastated zone where once knowable places were. The characters of both *Endgame* and *Molloy* may, indeed, be deranged: they may not properly understand the relationship between themselves and what places may exist out of the audience's sight, offstage. But equally, *Endgame* contains the possibility of being understood in a science-fictional way as a world in itself, an alternative world (Doležel 2010; Pavel 1986; Westphal 2011).

An understanding of place in Beckett as complex and, in Malpas's terms, multiply unitary needs to be developed. In Beckett's representations of place, a drive towards nowhere coexists with the presence in his writing of what, I would argue, could be called *manywheres*. As a way of conceptualizing location in Beckett, the notion of manywheres involves identifying overlaps between the places of the head (those of dreams and experience) and the places of geographers, town-planners, sanitary officials, almanac-writers,

compasses, and atlas-makers. The latter outer-world grouping is that found in books such as Whitaker's *Almanac* – the 1935 edition of which was used by Beckett during the composition of *Murphy* (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004: 19) – or the *A-Z* street atlas of London. In such books, as in this outside-world aspect of Beckettian manywheres, the actual names of streets and their topographic relationship to one another are at the very centre of the meaning of the book rather than being (as in narratological or ideological readings of 'realist' fiction they can seem) some extraneous or excessive piece of detail, placed there only to convince readers that they are in a world they know already.

Endgame can seem an unequivocal, extreme presentation of Beckett's drive towards nowhere. What spectators in the theatre will see at its outset is a nearly-bare room with its windows giving onto greyness, nothingness ('*Bare interior. / Grey light.*'). Later in the play, the key moment in locational terms is another stage direction: Clov '*gets up on ladder, turns the telescope on the without*' (106). This '*without*' means not an absence or lack, but an outside, aspatial context or environment. Its presence in *Endgame* clashes with the inward drive that Ackerley and Gontarski detect in Beckett's own career trajectory, suggesting as it does that his writing became stripped, after World War Two, of spatial situatedness. And then there is the following exchange between Hamm and Clov:

> HAMM: The waves, how are the waves?
> CLOV: The waves [*He turns the telescope on the waves.*] Lead. (107)

The sun is 'Zero' but outside it is not 'night', only 'Grey' or, wonderfully and oxymoronically, 'Light black. From pole to pole', according to Clov (107). Within the stage direction about the telescope, mid-way through Clov's words here, evidence can be found (in the word '*the*') that there actually are, in the world of the play, waves outside just as the real Victoria Street is nearby in the opening scene of Shaw's *The Philanderer*. But all an audience can know is that Clov turns the telescope, because that is all that an audience-member will actually see. Interestingly, the history of Beckett's text reveals that things were not always so blank and detached from any sense of locatedness. According to Ackerley and Gontarski, 'early drafts locate the action during and immediately after World War I, specifically in Picardy' (2004: 174). In this sense, *Endgame* was very directly stripped of toponymic references in the course of Beckett's shaping and revising of the play.

Far from being set nowhere, *Endgame* can be understood as placed in several places or spatial contexts simultaneously. Indeed, *Endgame* contains more than one somewhere. David Pattie (2000: 77) calls *Endgame* 'infinitely allusive', but in fact these sites can be specified and enumerated. The multplicity of location in *Endgame*, its manywheres, might be sketched out as follows:

1. Picardy after World War One.

2. Western Europe after World War Two.

3. An idea of nowhere. A world that has no postal addresses; a world that cannot be mapped.

4. The world inside a head, the universe of the rationalist or Occasionalist philosophy absorbed by Beckett while studying in Paris as a young man (Ackerley 2010: 29).

5. A possible world in the sense presented in hypothetical fiction or science fiction (viewed this way, events like those represented in *Endgame* could conceivably happen after a nuclear holocaust).

6. An imaginary world, the creation of a writer (this quality is shared by *Endgame* with every explicitly fictional depiction of place, but not those found in travel-writing or memoir).

7. The world of the stage, in which an audience looks through the fourth wall of a proscenium-arch theatre, at a group of people they know to be actors repeating what they have memorised, some words invented and written down by Samuel Beckett.

8. As Pattie (2000: 77) points out, the title of *Endgame* alludes to the space of the chess board (remembering that *Murphy* both contains a chess game, the moves of which are included in the text of the novel, and treats the map of London as if it were a game board around which characters, like pieces, move or are moved).

The richness consists in the fact that *Endgame* has all of these resonances made to harmonise or clash within it (some, indeed, such as Picardy, repressed so far as to become latent in the text), whereas more realist fictions of the same era, from Iris Murdoch to Alexander Baron, largely enact a single reference to a particular historical somewhere, and so direct attention away from the purely imaginary or possible-world qualities of their texts.

Conclusion: Toponyms, Regions and Categories of Writer

Understanding Beckett's peculiar multiplicity of place helps put him back into the world he inhabited, sometimes by drawing comparisons between him and writers to whom he is not usually compared. The big world and little world in *Murphy* can be related to one another on a scale of magnitude rather than being put into a conceptual opposition, as Beckett scholars such as Ackerley and Gontarski have tended to do. This reassessment, in turn, enables the locational complexity of 'realist' fictions to be grasped. A literary geographer has to work harder to tease the locational dimension out of Beckett's texts than those of writers who present actual places more directly and seemingly transparently, be they poets of place such as Wordsworth, or writers of fiction which abounds in seemingly reliable toponyms, such as Murdoch or Baron. Beckett's more surrealist or consciously denuded landscapes are remote from toponym-founded realism but they are nevertheless very richly locational, a fact opened up by the notion of manywheres. Nonetheless, Beckett is frequently treated in isolation from such writers or contrasted with them, when their texts all share the quality of being located, of being 'in place' (Malpas 2012: 63). Deictic indexicality of place is a feature of *all* writing.

The landscapes of the mind, of waking and dreaming, need to be related to the landscapes that can be explored in the world. Beckett explores West Brompton or Brewery Road and places them on the London map, but he also does so as part of an effort to explore his characters' psychology, as a reading of *Molloy* makes apparent. And the notion of recombining and abstracting in order to create a distinct fictional world, a 'Molloy country' (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004: 41), is something that Beckett experiments with more clearly and consciously than, say, Hardy or Arthur Morrison. Finally, his handling of location in both *Murphy* and *Endgame* is the outcome of a critique of the locational worlds found in Dickens, Balzac, Hardy and Shaw. Yet, all of these writers, Beckett included, lived and wrote in the same modern London and Paris.

Literary geographers such as Hones (2011: 694-7) are right to query the assumption that apparently realist fictions like Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* or the works of Shaw, Murdoch and Baron mentioned in this article need to be understood as straightforwardly set in one somewhere. But equally, the multiple unities of seemingly unplaced fictions such as *Endgame* and *Molloy* do also index several referential levels and exist in relation to actual topographies. As Malpas says, we are all always in place, and we are all also always in particular places (2012: 63). Places and the boundaries between them can be traced, and in doing so literary geographers have a toolkit available in Malpas's philosophical topology, for example in his reflections on 'Ground, Unity, and Limit' (2012: 73-95). The reading of Beckett offered in this article demonstrates his placed qualities, while also making the case for developing further dialogues between literary studies, place philosophy and human geography. Accounts of the relationship between representations of place in Beckett's work and the actual sites that can be visited around Dublin, Paris and London only hint at the potential for a literary place-based study of Beckett's career as a whole, which could make a significant contribution to the broader project of literary geography.

Acknowledgments

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