A country road. A tree. Evening : Beckett in a Minor Key Landscape

Tracy Valcourt

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By: Tracy Valcourt

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Dr. Ketra Schmitt Chair

Dr. Andre Furlani Examiner

Dr. Gavin Foster Examiner

Dr. Susan Cahill Supervisor

Approved by

2014

Dr. Ketra Schmitt
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dr. Paula Wood-Adams
Dean of Faculty

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ABSTRACT

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Tracy Valcourt

In 1936-37, Samuel Beckett made a six-month voyage to Germany, during which time he visited many galleries and museums and kept a detailed record of the art he viewed in what is now known as the "German diaries." This turning towards the image was a means of addressing aesthetic problems that had arisen following the completion of *Murphy* near the end of June 1936. In Dresden, he viewed Caspar David Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, which he commended for its "bémolisé" or "minor key'' romanticism, encapsulating the melancholy, muted and non-transcendent qualities Beckett admired in certain German Romantic and seventeenth-century Dutch landscape art. This painting became the key inspiration for the setting of *Waiting for Godot* and is representative of the sombre or brooding atmosphere Beckett consistently created in both his prose and theatre through a similar treatment of landscape. With attention to the writer's immersion in the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape tradition (e.g. in Adam Elsheimer and Hercules Seghers) and its German Romantic descendents, the thesis examines Beckett's own "minor key" aesthetic, to which pictorial motifs and techniques prominently contributed. Although his profound engagement with painting remains largely overlooked, Beckett's sensitive art historical writings extend from critical essays and catalogue prefaces to letters and journal entries. Drawing on these writings, the thesis documents his unappreciated role in the modernist re-evaluation of landscape painting, one which proved transformative for his own art.

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Introduction

> From the hills another joy came down, I mean the brief scattered lights that sprang up on their slopes at nightfall, merging in blur scarcely brighter than the sky, less bright than the stars, and which the palest moon extinguished. They were things that scarcely were, on the confines of silence and dark, and soon ceased.
>
> (*Murphy,* 206)

The painter and physician Carl Gustav Carus (1789 - 1869) wrote after the death of Caspar David Friedrich that his friend's sole diversions were solitary walks just before sunrise or just after sunset (Rewald, 14). This biographical detail would not be lost on Samuel Beckett, himself a noted *promeneur solitaire* and someone who found equal interest in life stories as in creative ones.[1] Beckett's enduring regard for the German Romantic painter represents an exception from his otherwise dismissive attitude towards the Romantic tradition, and particularly towards the German Romantic painters, whom he approached "with loathing." However, Friedrich's *bémolisé* or "minor key" (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 142) version of Romanticism, as Beckett identified it approvingly with reference to *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (fig.1), became a major artistic influence. Friedrich achieves this *bémolisé* effect largely through techniques such as moody lighting through a tonal palette and qualities of formal structure that allowed him to render a static "tableau vivant" -- or in Beckett's words, "moments of stillness."[2] Indeed "moments of

[1] For example, Beckett is known to have made detailed biographical notes on all the major Dutch painters of the seventeenth century.

[2] A prime example of this arrested dynamism is Friedrich's *Sea of Ice*, c. 1823-5 (fig.2).
In the textual notes on the 1995 Schiller Theatre *Godot* production directed by Beckett, he comments on 12 Wartstellen in the play (literally "waiting points"), or as Beckett referred to them, "moments of stillness" or "frozen waiting" (Moojani and Veit, 414). Also emphasizing a static and minor key quality in Friedrich is the limited range of movement of the figures, from complete arrestation to weighted plod. In contrast, the more dynamic gestures of typical Dutch landscapes suggest spontaneity and liberation in scenes that often concurrently depict both work and play in celebration of progress and harmony.

stillness" describes much of Beckett's later works where plot is substituted with a pattern of extended pause and restrained or repetitious movement and where setting becomes more atmospheric than topographical. According to James Knowlson the image in Beckett becomes "increasingly static, concentrated, and spectral [...] especially from *Happy Days* (1962) and *Play* (1964) onwards (Knowlson 2003, 47). As Neary says early in the novel *Murphy*, "All life is figure and ground"(4). Landscape, either "real," imagined, or a composite of the two, provides the relational ground for an often singular figure in this increasingly static image. Be it botanically rendered as "choked lairs of furze and brambles passim on its gentle slopes" in the early story "Fingal" or reduced to "another place" in the late story "Stirrings Still," landscape remains a major component of Beckett's aesthetic programme.

Friedrich's most well-established contribution to the Beckett oeuvre belongs to the conception of *Waiting For Godot;* [3] as James Knowlson points out, his influence is "most obvious in the two moonlit scenes that end each act, where the two figures of Estragon and Vladimir stand by the tree watching the moon rise silhouetted against a night sky" (Knowlson 1996, 342).[4] Upon viewing *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, on 14 February 1937, [5] Beckett pens in his diary the now well-known lines, which perhaps

[3] Jack B. Yeats's *Two Travellers* (fig.3) and *The Graveyard Wall* (fig. 4) have also been cited as possible inspiration for *Waiting for Godot*. See Fionnuala Croke 2006, 19.

[4] Friedrich did three versions of this painting -- two of them with male subjects and one with a man and a woman, entitled *Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon* (fig.5). While viewing this painting in Berlin with Ruby Cohn in 1975, Beckett claimed that this was the source for *Godot* (Knowlson 1996, 378). Obviously Beckett confused the paintings in this instance, which I find interesting as Knowlson suspects he had a photographic memory. The atmosphere of *Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon* is much different than the other two paintings in this series as there is more of a sentiment of "apartness" between the two subjects. This sentiment makes me recall Beckett's comment on the "solitude" and "loneliness" he noted in Jack B. Yeats's painting: "I find something terrifying, for example, in the way Yeats puts down a man's head and a woman's head side by side, as face to face, the awful acceptance of 2 entities that will never [word illegible: perhaps "unite"]" (Letter to Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett Papers, MS10402/131 Trinity College Dublin qtd. in Bedient, 342).

[5] Beckett had previously seen this painting, but failed to comment on it at the time.

mark the moment when Friedrich permanently enters his developing aesthetic repertoire: "Pleasant predilection for 2 tiny languid men in his landscapes, as in the little moon landscape, that is the only kind of romantic still tolerable, the bémolisé [the minor key]" (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 142). However, it is my contention here that Friedrich's *bémolisé* aesthetic influence on Beckett extends much farther than *Waiting for Godot* – that, in essence, the works of this Northern Romantic painter drew a path towards and away from *Godot:* as we will see, the distance traveled is not so far from the country roads winding through the tonal landscapes of the Dutch seventeenth century. Indeed, the Dutch, who introduced a new perspective to landscape painting beginning around 1610, were inclined towards the minor key in their pleasant scenes of man at ease in a world that embraces and rarely depicted nature in the major mode -- "those qualities [...] which left one awestruck and quivering, or those wild and forbidding sights that one finds, for example in the work of Salvator Rosa"(Freedberg, 17).[6] The quiet solitary resting scenes of Friedrich, reveal traces of the highly organized compositions of the Dutch forming into a more ominous environment. Rather than a celebration of prosperity and a sense of communion between fellow man and nature as found in the Dutch landscapes, in Friedrich we identify a lamentation of loss and a sense of profound human solitude in inhospitable terrain.

The topic of Beckett and the visual arts has received a significant amount of scholarly attention, with many excellent papers or entire volumes illuminating his interest in, and application of, art within his oeuvre. Generally, the methodology of the studies is to examine Beckett's literary representation of the image through a brief consideration of

[6] Beckett mentions Rosa in a similar context in a comparison to the Dutch and to Cézanne in two letters to Thomas MacGreevy on 8 September 1934 (*Letters Vol.1*, 220-223) and again on 16 September 1934 (*Letters Vol.1*, 220-223).

an established or possible source, with perhaps less emphasis on the original image than on Beckett's interpretation of it. Here I reverse the logic somewhat by looking more closely at a selection of artists from whom Beckett is known to have drawn, in order to better understand the comments he makes on their respective work and his subsequent applications of theme or structure in his own writing. My argument, which is supported by scholars such as Knowlson and Nixon, is that Beckett's use of the visual arts goes beyond erudite allusion toward adaptation of compositional schemata.[7] Moving from a topographic handling of space in earlier prose work to one more "atmospherically" rendered in later theatre, Beckett increasingly used the image to solve aesthetic problems in terms of the "minor key" aesthetic of the still and silent.[8]

Beckett's interest in landscapes is a reflection of his philosophical, political, and aesthetic program in the 1930s. Establishing this, I will then survey the landscapes of the Dutch and Flemish seventeenth-century, one of Beckett's most enduring interests. Here, the true genesis of the understated *bémolisé* will be revealed in works by such artists as Adam Elsheimer and Hercules Seghers, a quality which Friedrich then carries over into his "divine landscapes." The focus of this study will be based on notes taken by Beckett during his six-month "artistic pilgrimage" to Germany in 1936-37, a voyage he undertook to reassess his aesthetics after the writing of *Murphy*, and which can be understood as a turning towards the image to counter a growing mistrust of language.

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[7] Knowlson suggests a Dutch connection in the scenario of *Ohio Impromptu* and *Nacht und Träume*. I would also offer *Endgame* (Knowlson 2001, 2). See figures 6 and 7 for a comparison of the setting of *Endgame* with the *Dam Square in Amsterdam* by Jacob Van Ruisdael.

[8] I am grateful to James Knowlson who recently reiterated to me the importance of the *bémolisé* in Beckett's work. I also wish to thank Professor Knowlson for forwarding his excellent article on Beckett and the visual arts, "Beckett in the Musée Condé" via an email correspondence 20 January 2014.

The present research largely depends on notes taken by Beckett during his six-month German voyage in 1936-37. In the yet unpublished German diaries, Beckett records both the art he views, along with quotidian affairs, which he renders in a painterly fashion.[9] The letters he writes at this time reveal a preoccupation with art; the palimpsest of images formed during the trip recurs in Beckett's work. In the *Watt* notebooks, "images of images" form a composite of a minor key aesthetic, as is revealed in the passage that eventually became the section dealing with the painting on the wall of Erskine's room (Nixon 2011, 160):

> But as he meditated on the wall, the narrow white-washed wall with its church calendar before which, seated, he meditated, there came, and stayed, and went, now faint, now clear, images of images, Kaspar David Friedrich's Men and Moon, a coloured engraving of ? [in typescript, page 351: 'Hercules Seghers'] in the Zwinger? An Elsheimer pen drawing hanging one Christmas on a screen, Watt could not remember on loan from where, in the Kaiser Friedrich; and that as to where they were now, they might be anywhere now, burnt, or in a lumber-room, or sent away [Beckett's question marks]. (*Watt* notebook 4, 2v-3r). (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 160)

This passage unites three of the major painters who would contribute to Beckett's aesthetic through the lending of atmosphere or motif: the "minor key" of Friedrich, the "modern talent" of Seghers, and the "melancholy landscape" of Elsheimer.[10] Through detailed consideration of these three artists, my study will reveal the reasoning behind Beckett's descriptives. While other artists of the Dutch and Flemish seventeenth century will be mentioned, as well as Cézanne, who was a major figure in Beckett's understanding of man's relationship to landscape, the study focuses on the

[9] The unpublished German diaries are held in the archives at the University of Reading.
[10] As Mark Nixon notes, these artists and their descriptives are "entirely based on entries in the German diaries" (Nixon 2011, 217).

aforementioned three as they contribute most directly to the *bémolisé* in Beckett's work, and also speak to Beckett's consistently ambivalent attitude towards Romanticism.

CHAPTER ONE

Beckett in an Irish Landscape

On 8 September 1934, after a visit to the National Gallery in London, Samuel Beckett wrote Thomas MacGreevy a letter, much of which is dedicated to the topic of landscape painting. In it he compliments Cézanne for being "the first to see landscape & state it as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever" (*Letters Vol. I,* 222). Cézanne's success in resisting the "itch to animize" is contrasted against Salomon Ruysdael's "no longer authentic emotion" and Aelbert Cuyp's "irrelevant" cows (223). The letter reveals as much about Beckett's knowledge of art as it does his evolving perspective, which placed increasing emphasis on "artistic ignorance and honesty of expression over competence" (Nixon, 2011 143) -- qualities that will dictate his appreciation for, or dismissal of, a range of artists. Moreover, the statement hints at a major issue for him at the time, which was the ruptured relationship of the subject and object manifesting itself in the debate over the approach to Irish landscape.

That the topic of landscape should come up in this letter is not accidental, as the Irish landscape in the hands of the Literary Revivalists had become contested space for writers not sharing in the inclination towards a Romantic (and Nationalist) treatment. Indeed, as Mark Nixon notes, "the debate between a romantic and a modern approach to landscape (and the problematic object-subject relationship) lies at the heart of various critical pronouncements made by Beckett during 1934" (Nixon 2007, 62). Here Nixon refers to comments made in his essay of that same year, "Recent Irish Poetry," in which Beckett condemns Literary Revivalists for their antiquated approach to landscape and for

their "flight from self-awareness" (*Disjecta,* 71). In fact, Beckett's September 8 letter to MacGreevy serves as further justification of the opinions he offered in that essay. Further manifestation of the subject/object problematic, asserts John Pilling, is found in *Murphy* by way of "figure and ground." Due to this emphasis Pilling feels that "a particular interest attaches to the many moments in the MacGreevy letters when Beckett is effectively trying to situate subjects and objects in some kind of relationship one to another, rather than merely letting off squibs to see where the sparks will fall" (Pilling 1997, 130).

Beckett's concern with the rupture between subject and object, exemplified in the question of the approach to Irish landscape, remained largely unresolved in 1936 and melded with "linguistic doubts" that had been plaguing him since the completion of *Murphy.* On 27 June 1936 he announces: "Murphy is finished...I could do more work on it but do not intend to... It has been very hard work the past month and I am very tired, of it and words generally" (*Letters Vol.1*, 345).

The question of order of linguistic elements either sequentially or simultaneously lies at the heart of Beckett's linguistic struggle in the 1930s, as he grappled with language's inescapability from chronology.[11] With a pronounced fatigue with words, Beckett somewhat logically turns to the visual arts in an attempt to resolve these problems and to reassess his aesthetics-- his six-month trip to Germany in 1936,

[11] As Mark Nixon notes, "Beckett drew on his knowledge of Joyce's *Ulysses* as he adopted Grohman's distinction between the "sequential" and the "simulataenous when the question of language arose during a converstion with Eggers-Kestner in Munich (1937): "The dissonance that has become principle & that the word cannot express, because literature can no more escape from chronologies to simultaneities, from nebeneindander [sequential] to miteinander [simultaneous], that [sic] the human voice can sing chords. As I talk & listen realise suddenly Work in Progress is the only possible development from Ulysses, the heroic attempt to make literature accomplish what belongs to music – the miteinander & the simultaneous. Ulysses falsifies the unconscious, or the 'monologue intérieur,' in so far as it is obliged to express it as a teleology" (GD, 26 March 1937) (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 166-167). The nebeneindander/miteinander dialectic was first influentially theorized by Gotthold Lessing in *Laocoön* (1766).

represents what James Knowlson termed an “artistic pilgrimage” (Knowlson 2001, 74). During this time, Beckett spent a great deal of time in galleries and socialized with many German curators and artists, and kept a detailed record of his encounters with art. The range and number of artists mentioned in the diary attest to Beckett’s sophisticated understanding of art and also reveal patterns of attraction towards certain painters or works, such as “the Old Masters: above all Rembrandt, Giorgione, Caravaggio, Antonella da Messina, but also Elsheimer [sic], van Honthorst, the Ruysdaels, Van Goyen and (sometimes) Wouwerman” (Knowlson 2001, 2).

CHAPTER TWO

Beckett's Lines of Sight: Clarifiers and Obscurantists

To the eye there is displayed a confused and inarticulate juxtaposition of things; and to put this into order is the task of the human spirit.

(Friedlander, 91)[12]

Throughout the 1930s, Beckett discussed his writing in terms of seeing, therefore his turning towards the visual arts to solve an aesthetic question related to language is not surprising.[13] Beckett's long-standing relationship to art was of such refinement and depth that he considered art a "viable option" during difficult periods of writing or publication (Nixon 2011, 132).[14] However, as Nixon notes, "it was precisely at such times that the encounter with art enabled Beckett to clarify, shape, and formulate his aesthetic preoccupations, and thus find new approaches to his writing" (Nixon 2011, 132). Indeed the German trip coincides with a very difficult period both personally and professionally following the death of his father in June 1933, two months after that of his lover and cousin Peggy Sinclair, and a growing uncertainty of how to go on after *Murphy*. Quite expectedly, this period was one of low production for Beckett and could be viewed as a time of intake rather than output. However, as Georgy Kepes reminds us, "To perceive an image is to participate in a forming process; it is a creative act" (Kepes 1944, 16), and

[12] Qtd. in McManus, 1.

[13] Given Beckett's concern with "seeing" at the time, he somewhat logically turns to the Dutch seventeenth century. This period was known as the Age of Observation due to the Dutch Republic's flourish in empirical and theoretical enquiry brought about by the development of lenses and other scientific tools, which enabled a more profound analysis of the material world (Kuretsky, 39). The increased capacity for measurement of space in such fields as cartography and astronomy also corresponds with a growing interest in another Beckettian theme -- the measurement of time.

[14] Encouraged by MacGreevey, Beckett applied for the post of assistant curator at the National Gallery in London in 1933. In a 9 October 1933 letter to MacGreevy Beckett claims, "I think I'd be happy there for a time amongst the pigeons…apart from my conoyership [sic] that can just about separate Uccello from a handsaw, I could cork the post as well as another…but it won't come off and I don't expect it to" (*Letters Vol. 1*, 166 -67).

during the German trip of 1936-37, Beckett participates in an extended forming process which provided him with a rich compendium of images from which he would constantly draw, consciously or not.

Part of Beckett's attraction to art, and particularly to painting as a means of working through aesthetic preoccupations originates in shared concerns with the handling of space and the creation of atmosphere through formal composition and the manipulation of light. As Ernst Gombrich declares, making a painting is a matter of "framing and filling;" Beckett may have applied these simplified principles, while adding a third, that of "erasing" or in more painterly terms, "overpainting." The principle of erasure, more than any other, can be viewed as contributing to what Beckett called a hoped-for "literature of the unword," while describing the reductionist tactics employed by Caspar David Friedrich, whose sparseness of tableaux was interpreted as near scandalous in the late 1800s.[15] Beckett first mentions "Literatur des Unworts" in a 9 July 1937 letter to Axel Kaun. In this letter, Beckett describes his emerging perspective on language "as a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it" and questions the position of literature, asking if it "alone is to be left behind on that old, foul road long ago abandoned by music and painting" (*Letters Vol. 1*, 518)? He continues:

> Is there something paralysingly sacred contained within the unnature of the word that does not belong to the elements of the other arts? Is there any reason why that frightfully arbitrary materiality of the word surface should not be dissolved, like, for example, the sound surface, devoured by great black pauses, of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?
>
> […]

[15] Most notably sparse is *Monk by the Sea* (figure 8).

> Perhaps, Gertrude Stein's Logographs come closer to what I mean. The fabric of the language has at least become porous, if regrettably only quite by accident, and, as it were, as a consequence of procedure somewhat akin to the technique of Feininger. (*Ibid*)

In the Kaun letter painting constitutes an advance on the aesthetic problem of expression that literature has not yet faced. Beckett's approach to word and sound in terms of surface reveals a painterly concern, and his reference to Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956), whose paintings possess a crystalline quality, is particularly astute. Feininger's landscapes became increasingly ordered by underlining planes of colour to luminous effect, and the transparency evoked through this technique appears to play with two levels of surface -- that of the image (which appears glass-like) and that of the canvas (which disappears). Feininger initially went to Germany as a teen to study music, and the "contrapuntal tenor" of his imagery is considered a reflection of this enduring interest (MoMA Web). That Beckett would choose this artist as a model of linguistic aspiration in an anology that involves both an optical and auditory element demonstrates his impressive sensitivity to the visual arts, as well as the two-fold structure of his literary aims formed around image and sound (art and music).

Ruby Cohn notes the importance of the Kaun letter in reference to Beckett's postwar writing, and its demonstration of the distance he had traveled "from the 'verbal rapture' of his Joyce essay (1929) to the desire for a porous language that approaches music" (Cohn 2001, 89). The letter also reveals Beckett's emerging aesthetic, which placed increasing emphasis on incoherence, ignorance, and silence; elements that he identified in music and visual art, and served as models for his linguistic aspirations.

Many of Beckett's letters to Thomas MacGreevy and Georges Duthuit (among others) are expressions of such painterly concerns. Both MacGreevy and Duthuit were well-versed in art and Beckett's extensive correspondence with them contributed to his artistic education. MacGreevy published a number of books on artists, lectured at the National Gallery in London in the mid-1930s (during which time he met Beckett) and held the position of Director of Ireland's National Gallery from 1950-1963.[16] Georges Duthuit, Matisse's son-in-law, was an important post-war art figure in France, and became the editor of the art and literary journal, *transition* in 1947.[17] Composition was of great interest to Duthuit, who rejected the classic perspective as advanced by the Italians. In a letter written 27 July 1948 to Duthuit,[18] Beckett refers to such opinions in a discussion on space in *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (c.1475-76) by the Sicilian Renaissance painter, Antonello da Messina:[19]

> I feel so clearly what you say about space and the Italians. I remember a picture in the Zwinger, a St. Sebastian by Antonello da Messina -- tremendous, tremendous. It was in the first room, and it stopped me in my tracks every time. Pure space by dint of mathematics, tiling, flagstones rather, black and white, with long, Mantegna-style foreshortenings,[20] that would draw moans from you, and the victim of

[16] Thomas MacGreevy was the chief art critic for *The Studio* from 1938 to 1940. He published several books on art and artists, including *Jack B. Yeats : An Appreciation and an Interpretation*; *Pictures in the Irish National Gallery* (both 1945); and *Nicolas Poussin* (1960) (http://www.nationalgallery.ie).

[17] See, for example, "Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit." Originally published in *transition Forty-Nine 5* (December 1949) and republished in *Disjecta* (138-45), *Three Dialogues* are stylized extracts of conversations between Beckett and Duthuit, published on Duthuit's insistence that Beckett make his aesthetic opinions better known: "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing which with to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (*Letters Vol.2* 140). Beckett was a frequent translator for *transition.*

[18] For Georges Duthuit's countering of this classical perspective on composition, see the *Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 2*, p. 88.

[19] Notable influences to Messina are Netherlandish painters Jan van Eyck and Petrus Christus, whose works he may have seen during time spent in Naples (Christiansen web).

[20] Beckett is astute in this observation. In his essay on Antonello da Messina, Keith Christiansen of the Department of European Paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art states,"the 'steeply foreshortened' pose of the soldier asleep in the background, "like the setting, [are] clearly inspired by the work of Andrea Mantegna"(Christiansen web).

> the stoning,[21]displayed, displaying himself, to the admiration of the courtiers taking the Sunday air on their balconies, the whole thing invaded, eaten into by the human. In front of such work, such a victory over the reality of disorder, over the pettiness of heart and mind, it is hard not to go hang yourself. (*Letters Vol.2,* 86)

Art historian, Keith Christiansen states that Messina's depiction of the background figures in the *St. Sebastian*, which is done with "acuity" and [a sense of] "wonder" represents an unprecedented interpretation of "the luxuriant self-absorption of Venetian life" (Christiansen web). Beckett's admiration for this painting shows his identification of a pioneering perspective through a more holistic approach to narrative in painting, where many things happening at once are given equal treatment, no matter the perceived importance of the character.[22] As such, Messina's *St. Sebastian* becomes an exemplar of the simultaneity Beckett sought in language and a model of generalized character treatment in his own narratives. In his later prose, in which there is often only one figure, Beckett extends this generalization to the treatment of setting as well, eventually developing a sense of the incommensurability between subject and landscape he identified in the works of Cézanne, a topic which will be addressed later in this paper.

The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian (fig. 9), along with the martyr motif itself, was of prolonged interest to Beckett and this particular painting is mentioned in several letters and diary entries.[23] For example, more than ten years earlier, in a letter to MacGreevy (16 February 1937), he describes the same painting he views in Dresden as "stupendous --the tiny figures of the quick in the background gossiping and making appointments under a

[21] The martyr of St. Sebastian is typically depicted as shot with arrows, as is the case in Messina's version. This is an interesting example of Beckett's "images of images" as he seems to mistake the narrative of St. Sebastian with *The Stoning of St. Stephen* -- a young Rembrandt made a painting of this title in 1625.
[22] Elsheimer, as will be demonstrated, also gave a similarly equal treatment to "secondary" characters or narratives. In his painting, *The Flight into Egypt* (c. 1609) no narrative group is marked as having any more importance than the other.
[23] A card of this image was sent to MacGreevy on 2 February 1937, and Beckett describes it further on 16 February 1937 (Knowlson 1996, 482).

paradisal sky" (*Letters Vol. 1*, 444). And in an entry in the German diaries around the same time (1 February 1937), he again notes the background figures behind the centralized and foregrounded martyr: "Soldier snoring middle left. Women staring from balcony...Men chatting & going about their business. It is good to be alive" (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 147).[24]

Consistent in these extracts is the attention Beckett pays to the background and the supporting narratives that exist in that field. This reveals Beckett's manner of traveling the canvas with a trained eye,[25] and gives a compositional schemata for Beckett's narrative, wherein the subject or "climax" is but a discrete spatial reference point. Beckett's movement beyond the foreground to the small-scale supporting narratives in the background demonstrates his holistic understanding of two-dimensional composition, wherein the creation of depth depends on the support of one field to the other. This concept aligns closely with the tenets of Gestalt theory which states, "Perception is based on the interdependence of the every part within the whole" (Wenger 36).

Beckett may have seen painting as a means of "escape from chronologies to simultaneities" (GD, 26 March 1937)[26] and his heightened interest in the background may partly explain his lasting fondness for landscape painting of the Dutch seventeenth century. The Dutch landscapists illustrated simultaneity by distributing minor narratives across the canvas, effectively eliminating any singular subject, thereby encouraging a holistic comprehension of the scene. As such, there is no hierarchy of subject and as art

[24] See figures 9.1 and 9.2 for details of *St. Sebastian*.
[25] Psychology studies show that viewers trained in art travel a canvas in a more inclusive and "all-over" manner visiting all fields of the composition, whereas an untrained eye often sticks to the foreground or area of central optical focus. See for example, McManus, I.C. and Catherine M. Kitson.
[26] Qtd. in Nixon 2011, 167.

historian Desmond Shawe -Taylor asserts, "in some ways the most interesting subjects [in Dutch art] are the most inconsequential" (Shawe -Taylor, 24). In distributing the narratives across the canvas and giving no key to definite or exclusive subject matter, the Dutch created in a less abstract way, the "incommensurability" Beckett admired in Cézanne, while contributing to a minor key atmosphere wherein no singular climax or crisis can be discerned.

Beckett's eye for the "inconsequential" speaks, for example, to the perspective he applies to composing the "bottled climates" that make up *More Pricks than Kicks*. John Pilling notes that the stories comprising this early collection were written "alongside or (in more painterly terms) in the shadow of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*" (Pilling 2011,1), between May 1931 and July 1932, a period coinciding with his heightened interest for the Dutch masters, which would no doubt contribute to his aesthetics at the time.

The three stories in *More Pricks* that occur in a pastoral setting are "Fingal," "Love and Lethe," and "Walking Out," all of which jostle along in a panoramic anti-epiphanic fashion, with the former and the latter exhibiting a tendency for asymmetrical composition in the sense that the "point" of the story rests in an otherwise unassuming place (or in the "Rule of Thirds," somewhere right of centre).[27] For example, Pilling posits that the entire narrative of "Fingal" is built as a showcase for the anecdote about the motte that occurs three-quarters of the way through the story, giving Beckett the

[27] According to Palmer, Gardner and Williams, "The rule of thirds is a well-known heuristic for spatial composition that is frequently discussed in photography. The rule of thirds clearly implies that the subject should not be placed at or even very near the centre of the frame either horizontally or vertically to produce the most pleasing effect." Whereas, the *Law of the Golden Section* according to the ancient architect Vitruvius states: "For a space divided into equal parts to be agreeable and aesthetic, between the smallest and largest parts there must be the same relationship as between this larger part and the whole space" (Johnson web).

opportunity to share "his own encounter in the country with the idiot savant old man who actually told him the 'tale' of the tower and of Swift and Stella" (Pilling 2011, 43).[28] Whereas, "Walking Out," according to Pilling, "plays the *More Pricks* trick of surrounding what would be the focal point in a more conventional story -- the accident -- with lots of much more trivial business. It is the latter, not the former that interests Beckett. [...] the true "hero" of the story proves to be not Belacqua but the vagabond, 'this real man at last'"(*Ibid*, 28). To make a comparison to painting, this neutrality of subject confuses the focal point of the composition for the viewer, and in a manner of speaking we could liken Beckett's pastoral tales of *More Pricks* to the paintings of Elsheimer, which involve several narrative groups and an equalizing treatment of character that makes the "true" subject difficult to discern.

The unpublished notes of Grace McKinley (1931) reveal Beckett's early interest in composition as he contrasts the background in Racine with that of Balzac in a painterly idiom.[29] In these notes, he delineates three depths of perspective in *Andromaque*: "1) Palace; 2) Sea; 3) Unextinguished flames of Troy" (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006, 309). Dividing the fields of the theatrical space is reminiscent of a painter's organization of the three-dimensional world (either lived or imagined) onto a two-dimensional plane. Indeed these depths of perspective in Racine are understood in compositional terms, as Beckett concludes, "Racine's background is for the artist, not for the psychologist" (qtd. in *Ibid*):

[28] On 5 Jan. 1933, SB wrote MacGreevy a letter mentioning the anecdote of the "motte" -- a conversation which occurred between SB and "a local of Lambay" on Boxing Day 1932 at the gates of the Portrane lunatic asylum (*Letters Vol.I*, 150).

[29] Grace McKinley was one of Beckett's students at Trinity College in 1931. McKinley's notes are held in the Beckett International Foundation's Archive at the University of Reading, along with course notes taken by Leslie Daiken. Trinity College Library also holds notes on Racine by Rachel Burrows, another of Beckett's students at the time (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006, 310).

> He [Racine] does not want to explain *Andromaque* by Troy etc. as Balzac would have done. In Racine the work of background is to give substance to the characters -- to give them overtones: it is worth more than its face-value. [...] Stress on background has nothing whatever to do with the phylogenesis of Balzac. The phylogenetic position of Balzac is to be distinguished from the ontogenetic position of Racine [...] The interesting part of the background is the suggestion of the place where the unknotting will take place. Prospective as opposed to perspective: All the light in Racine is on the front of the stage. The background is only a recurrent menace in the shadow behind. Quite the contrary in Balzac whose background was a devouring thing to his characters. (309)

The McKinley notes call attention to two major motifs in the Beckett canon, that of management of space and that of the use of light; as Beckett's aesthetic vision continues to move towards his own version of incommensurability, he is able to use these two motifs with increasing mastery.

In the earliest works, explains Mark Nixon, references to art and artists were used as signifiers contributing to an "erudite layer beyond the literary one in order to clarify or obscure descriptions and concepts" (Nixon 2011, 133). In this statement, Nixon touches on issues central to Beckett's aesthetics, which could be described by "symphonic" patterns of clarifiers and obscurantists arranged successively, simultaneously, or interchangeably (as Beckett finally concludes): "The classifiers are the obscurantists" (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 186).[30] These patterns of form and space hint at Beckett's aesthetic thinking in the thirties, which was based on "the notion of 'spaces' or gaps and the nature of thresholds delineating absences" (*Ibid*, 164). Here Nixon refers to Beckett's development of the "art of space" within *Dream,* revealed through Belacqua's emphasis on silences: "The experience of my reader shall be in the phrases, in the silence,

[30] Beckett makes this statement in a letter to Mary Manning Howe, 13 December 1936. In this letter, he describes the perspective which is forming during his trip to Germany, one of "instinctive respect, at least, for what is real, & therefore has not in its nature, to be clear. Then when somehow this goes over into words, one is called an obscurantist. The classifiers are the obscurantists" (*Letters Vol.1*, 397).

communicated by the intervals, not the terms of the statement..." (*Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, 137). In this taste for the *bémolisé* of Friedrich's moon watchers or the solitary resting scenes of Wouwerman, Beckett once again emphasizes the silence and the pause, as this is where the "action" paradoxically occurs in these paintings.[31]

To render a visual metaphor, one could consider clarifiers and obscurantists in painterly terms wherein the positioning of the "intolerable brightness" alongside the shadow creates a kind of chiaroscuro effect, which summarizes a paradigm of attracting forces that drew Beckett towards certain artists and thinkers and describes both aesthetic and thematic consistencies throughout his work. Of Beckett's use of light and dark imagery, James Knowlson writes:

> There can have been few, if any writers, who while not aiming to expound a strictly theological or cosmological system based upon contrarieties, have used light and dark imagery as consistently or as interestingly as has Samuel Beckett. Light and darkness, which means, in terms of dominant colours, white and black with an intermediate grey, together with images of vision or blindness -- even if only those of a temporary closing of the eyes, curtains or blinds -- are all obsessive features which have important structural, as well as thematic roles to play in the fiction, the plays, even in certain of the poems of Samuel Beckett. (Knowlson 1972, 12)

A sensitivity towards light, among other aesthetic sensibilities was partially cultivated through philosophical readings completed around this time, which also encouraged the development of a quietist attitude within Beckett -- a quality that he would seek out in works of art, music and literature. Undoubtedly, it was Beckett's identification with Schopenhauer's concept of "life as something to be endured, compounded by his renunciation of the will,"which had the most influence in persuading

[31] The same reasoning can be applied to the spot-lit Elsheimer painting, *The Flight into Egypt* or any number of Seghers's landscapes featuring the *promeneur solitaire*. Indeed the Dutch seventeenth-century is not short of resting scenes in any variety.

Beckett to adopt a quietist attitude (Nixon 2007, 54). No doubt, both Schopenhauer's pessimism and his prescription for enduring the misery of existence: art (or aesthetic contemplation), compassion, and resignation (Büttner, 114), appealed to Beckett and gave further motivation for a turning towards the image as a kind of coping or problem-solving mechanism.

As an illustration of this attitude, Nixon points to Beckett's 1934 review on Thomas MacGreevy's poems, entitled "Humanistic Quietism," an essay that depends throughout on a vocabulary of light and darkness. This use of terminology is understandable, given that these very qualities are of central importance to the quietism evoked in Macgreevy's poems. In the review, Beckett quotes from MacGreevy's "Gloria de Carlos V," "Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost," and "Nocturne of the Self-Evident," all of which include the words "light" or "brightness" -- motifs that also drew him to the sombre mood of Dutch "spot-lit" night landscapes. However, at the end of the last-mentioned poem, occurs an image evocative of Friedrich, which anticipates Beckett's long-term relationship with Friedrich's work to be cultivated during his German visit:

I see alps, ice, stars and white starlight
In a dry, high silence (qtd. in Bradley 35)

Indeed such a description, suggestive of sublime elements of height and vastness, recurs in many of Friedrich's landscapes.

MacGreevy's writing is noted for its registering of displacement and exclusion, as could be said for Friedrich's (and Beckett's) work. Notably he addresses these themes through a modern approach to language and landscape: like Friedrich, MacGreevy in "Nocturne of the Self-Evident," seems to re- or dis-locate the divine from a religious

arena into a secular world (one which may decline such embrace), and does so in a minimally depicted tableau:

I see no immaculate feet on those pavements,
No winged forms,
Foreshortened,
As by Rubens or Domenichino
Plashing the silvery air,
Hear no cars,
Elijah's or Apollo's
Dashing about
Up there.
(qtd. in Bradley 35-36)

Beckett's review of MacGreevy's work appears in *Disjecta*, and its placement directly before his essay "Recent Irish Poetry" is noteworthy, as the two essays epitomize the argument in Ireland between modernism and Romanticism as espoused by the Revivalists. Anthony Cronin offers that it was the dominant and dismissive attitude of the Revivalists which contributed to MacGreevy's ultimate silencing:

> To all intents and purposes after 1934 MacGreevy was silent, though he was to live for another thirty years. It is tempting to blame Ireland and indeed I do not think that Ireland is entirely guiltless in the matter [...]A man of exquisite manners and great dignity, he was, as I recollect it anyway, locally a bit of a joke. What Samuel Beckett called "the antiquarians, delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the true Gael the Ossianic goods" occupied the foreground. One doesn't suppose that the cosmopolitan MacGreevy was asked for many poems. (Cronin 1982, 166)

MacGreevy too would turn to art to reconcile aesthetic (and pragmatic) difficulties, first as a reviewer of art and ultimately as the Director of the National Gallery of Ireland. However, the poetic silence would remain final, as he was to publish only one volume of poetry in his lifetime. Due to his involvement with art, Thomas MacGreevy would become one of Beckett's most important confidantes in discussing artistic matters, and John Pilling cites Beckett's 8 September 1934 letter to MacGreevy on Cézanne as

marking the beginning of a more serious discussion on art between the two friends (Pilling 1997, 132).

Seeing the Self Seeing: Apperception and the Rückenfigur

> Somewhere [man] must know that self-perception is the most frightening of all human observations. He must know that when man faces himself, he is looking into an abyss.
>
> Samuel Beckett in an interview with John Gruen (1969)[32]

In philosophical terms, clarification and obfuscation recall the concept of apperception, particularly as it is expressed in the theorizing of Leibniz, for whom the term denotes "the process by which obscure, unconscious and confused representations are made clear and distinct, *petites perceptions* transformed into self-awareness" (Ackerly and Gontarski, 16). Apperception, mentioned both in *Dream* and *Murphy* was of thematic concern for Beckett over his life and contributed greatly to his aesthetic.

It is this ocular division of perception and apperception which made Beckett *se faire voyant (Nixon 2011, 183),* allowing him to concurrently see and to see himself seeing so that a painting became a window as much a mirror (or a screen that blocked either prospect or reflection).[33] Beckett developed this "fractured" line of sight through readings on Kant, Leibniz, and Schopenhauer, all of whom offered varying theories on

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[32] "Samuel Beckett talks about Beckett." *Vogue* (Dec. 1969): 210 (qtd. in Zeifman, 236)

[33] Interestingly, a theme of apperception finds a parallel in Friedrich, embodied in a self-portrait he completed for his friend Johan Ludwig Gebhard Lund in 1800 (fig. 10), in which he depicts his body at work making the actual portrait and therefore struggles with the gaze -- a fact which is successfully translated in the final work as the labour expended in the process. As Koerner describes: "Friedrich depicts his body at work, engaged in the act of simultaneously sketching, posing, seeing [...] Observing himself as he observes himself in the mirror, Friedrich discovers and represents the struggle between his public, visible, portrayable face, and a hidden inner energy legible only in the gesture of the gaze" (Vaughn, 83). The apperceptive image of the artist (or creator) creating himself creating makes an interesting parallel to John Pilling's comment on Beckett's late prose as a "psychologically complex yet narratologically transparent image of a self imagining itself [or further yet], a self imagining itself imagining itself imagining itself, often suspecting that it is being imagined itself" (Pilling 1995, xxix).

the theme. However, it was Schopenhauer, to whom Beckett would repeatedly turn from 1930 on, who had the most profound effect on his mode of seeing, and encouraged Beckett's quietist tendencies, which would subsequently affect his taste for art and artists. In Schopenhauer, Beckett felt alignment in "an essentially negative evaluation of human existence wherein the path to any semblance of redemption was through the artistic creative act" (Nixon 2011, 9). And it was Schopenhauer who supplied Beckett with the metaphor of the veil of Maya, which Beckett then applied to language which "must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the nothingness) behind it -- a sentiment which offers yet another metaphor of light and darkness."[34]

Indeed as Nixon notes, perception was a main concern for Beckett in the 1930s, as throughout this period he discussed his writing in terms of *seeing,* and "continued to seek a creative way forward within the field of the visual arts […] this focus on seeing partly explains his alertness to the optical relation between the painter and his material during his visits to the German galleries" (2011, 161). I would also offer that this optical astuteness contributes to Beckett's predilection for the *Rückenfigur* paintings of Friedrich, in which a solitary subject stands gazing out into the void, at once looking inward and outward, as seen from behind. The *Rückenfigur* is both subject, in the vista he shares with the viewer and the object that obstructs the view. The position, argues Rosemblum allows the spectator (or in Beckett's case, "reader") a maximum amount of empathy, "for he can easily take his place beside or within these faceless beings who seemed transfixed and absorbed by the luminous spectacle before them" (Rosenblum, 22). This back facing figure appears or is implied in Beckett's prose and the author himself posed as *Rückenfigur* in several photographs. The character in "Stirrings Still"

[34] Letter to Axel Kaun, 9 July 1937 in *Letters Vol.1*, 516-520.

also appears as one "Seen always from behind withersover he went" (*The Complete Short Prose*, 260). The image of the character in the first passage of "Stirrings Still" as one with head in his hands, imagining himself rising and going is found also in *Still*, "Mort de A.D." and *Naucht and Träume* (Ackerley and Gontarski, 544).[35] In "Stirrings Still," the "self" in a restless wander, arrives unknowingly from the inner place of the mind to "the outer world," where he is met with a limitless vista, evocative of a sublime landscape by Friedrich :

> Result finally he was in a field of grass which went some way if nothing else to explain his tread and then a little later as if to make up for this some way to increase his trouble. For he could recall no field of grass from even the very heart of which no limit of any kind was to be discovered but always in some quarter or another some end in sight such as a fence or other manner of bourne from which to return. Nor on his looking more closely to make matters worse was this the short green grass he seemed to remember eaten down by flocks and herds but long and grey in colour very here and there on white. ("Stirrings Still")[36]

Notably the landscape of his reappearance is not a living one of vibrant green and growth, but a colourless one that threatens to dissolve altogether. The grey and white of the grass suggests the evanescence of human life, as is suggested in the biblical metaphor "all flesh is grass" (Isaiah 40:6).[37] Here, as well as in the other titles just mentioned, Beckett, like Friedrich, locates his character on the "precipice of nothingness" so that "the relation of the figures to the landscape now bears a privacy, an intensity which trespasses upon the kind of silent, Protestant meditation upon the mysteries of the beyond" (Rosenblum, 22). However, if in the stillness of Friedrich's early work, we sense a "mood of intense communion between man and the most impalpable of nature's phenomena – light, colour

[35] Many of the journeys taken by characters in the later prose are propelled partly by aporia and partly by apperception.
[36] *The Complete Short Prose*, 263.
[37] Qtd. in Koerner, 21 in reference to the work of Friedrich.

and atmosphere" (*Ibid*, 21), in Beckett we are made aware of nature's indifference to man and therefore apartness, not union, defines the relationship. As such, the image created in the passage above resembles more the later aims of Jack B. Yeats, who "sought to exteriorize the twilight area between fact and possibility, experience and illusion" (Oppenheim, 163).

CHAPTER THREE

Looking for Quietism in a Dutch Landscape

Oh truly happy is he who loves to spend his life in solitude in the woods, fleeing the peasures of the world! Thus hiding away, ready to serve God, he seeks the supreme kingdom with continous prayers.

(Inscription in the lower margin of *Landscape with a Hermit Praying* (1635), engraving by Abraham Bloemaert after a design (c.1605) by Frederick Bloemart.)[38]

Both Knowlson and Nixon cite Beckett's enthusiasm for seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish paintings, a topic of which he had sufficient knowledge after dedicating a period of his life to studying the techniques and biographies of Dutch masters. The previously mentioned letter to MacGreevy (8 September 1934), demonstrated that Beckett's knowledge of the Dutch and Flemish painters was well established even before his trip to Germany, such that he does not gloss the tradition, but can select artists who were and were not succeeding according to the yardstick of style and sentimentality. His attraction to this tradition, which is celebrated for its attention to minute details, quality of light, and its interest in representing decay through the passage of time, reveals something of Beckett's aesthetic program, one which was in constant but subtle reconfiguration during his German voyage due to his heightened exposure to art.

That Beckett would appreciate similar traits between Friedrich and the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape tradition is not surprising, as Friedrich studied at the Danish Royal Academy in Copenhagen (1794), and was highly influenced by Dutch landscape painting. The Danish Royal Academy in Copenhagen was considered to be among the finest schools in Europe, boasting an impressive collection of works,

[38] Qtd. in Kuretsky, 252. *Landscape with a Hermit Praying* can be found on page 253 of Kuretsky's *Time and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*.

particularly of the Dutch seventeenth-century; here Friedrich would have encountered the mountainous scenes of Adam Elsheimer and the moonlit narratives of Aert van der Neer (1603 - 1677), and most influentially (to Friedrich), the masterfully lit landscapes by the Dane Jens Juel (1748 -1802)(fig. 11).

As R.H. Fuchs explains in *Dutch Painting*, in seventeenth-century Holland, art theory pressures were less severe than they were in Italy, and therefore escaped a level of critical interest. This fact allowed landscape and still-life artists to enjoy a certain amount of artistic liberty otherwise unknown by their colleagues practicing genre or history paintings (104): "The most important innovation in Dutch painting, the realist approach, could therefore establish itself more easily in landscape than in any other category" (104). Fuchs describes the Dutch innovation as demonstrating a "matter-of-factness," which no doubt would appeal to Beckett's dislike for the "anthropomorphized" landscape. As an example of this innovation, the art historian describes *View of Zierikzee* (1618) by Esaias van de Velde (fig.12), which with the removal of the artist's name (and the mention of fishermen) could easily be mistaken for a description of many of Friedrich's paintings, and is reminiscent of Beckett's aesthetic embellishments in both his fiction and theatre:

> There is a distant outline of the town, occupying almost all the horizon in a not too distant view, and painted almost exclusively in dark tones of brown, as one might see the silhouette of a town in the failing light of dusk, with only a few patches of very dark green in the river bank. The sky is a liquid blue, with stray clouds which by their diagonal sweep define and emphasize the sky's width. The sky and town are reflected in the calm water. In the foreground, as an introductory *repoussoir,* is the near bank with fishermen. Their silhouettes, and the strong red colour worn by the middle one, are points against which the vast space beyond may be measured. All chances to embellish the picture, to make it more attractive to contemporary late Mannerist taste, have been passed by. The painting is deliberately dry, almost to the point of fanaticism, and that is why it contains, already at this early date, the complete programme of realist

> landscape: the low viewpoint, the wide space, the horizon, the sky, the little figures as spatial points of reference. (Fuchs 104-5)

Even more striking of the Beckett/Friedrich nexus is Fuch's summary of van de Velde's *Dunes and Hunters (1629)* (fig.13),[39] which "introduces another element that was to become part of the basic [Dutch landscape] programme, and in an equally dry manner":

> ...the single tree in the middle ground, intersecting with the horizon and darkly drawn against a bleak sky. The uneven ground, which allows for differences in light, and which helps the spatial progression towards the horizon, is another programmatic point (105).

Indeed this description is reminiscent of the visual conception of *Godot* and the spatial progression towards the horizon is suggestive of compositional techniques that Friedrich would employ and Beckett would appreciate and apply in his own right. As James Knowlson points out, "many of Beckett's theatrical images can be seen as a reworking of visual imagery that was derived from, or inspired by, the Old Masters" (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 148). Undoubtedly Beckett's mental archives were so laden with images that influences were at some level unconscious palimpsests amassed through years of art exposure.[40]

Van de Velde was a contemporary of Jan van Goyen and Salomon van Ruysdael, the latter being uncle and mentor to Jacob van Ruisdael (to whom Beckett refers in his letter of September 8 1934 to MacGreevy).[41] Beckett's dismissal of van Ruisdael is

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[39] As Nixon states in the German diaries, Beckett comments on "literally hundreds of paintings," therefore it is difficult to say with certainty if he encountered this painting on this trip. Despite my efforts, I was unable to locate the whereabouts of these particular Van de Velde paintings in the 1930s. Fuchs (1978) cites *View of Zierikzee* as being in the Gemäldegalerie collection of Staatliche Museen in Berlin. As Van de Velde is valued for his innovative approach contributing to standards of the Dutch landscape tradition, it is safe to assume that Beckett would be conscious of him and would have had some exposure to his work.

[40] I offer *Winter* from the *Stages of Life Series* (c.1834) as another possible influence or at very least draw attention to another Friedrich painting, with a very *Waiting for Godot* - type sentiment (fig.14).

[41] The painting to which Beckett is referring is *Entrance to the Forest* (National Gallery, London) by Jacob van Ruysdael (or Ruisdael). The editors of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940* point out that the painting may in fact be wrongly attributed to this artist. I could find no record of *Entrance to the Forest* in

curious as the artist (who was also a surgeon)[42] enjoyed depicting Northern European landscapes (like Friedrich) and was influenced by artists for whom Beckett expressed fondness, namely Hercules Seghers. While it is noted that in the 1650s van Ruisdael did begin to use a brighter palette, his compositions remain notoriously stark and dramatic. Potentially off-putting for Beckett in this case was the tightness of his compositions, which could be termed "claustrophobic." As Nixon points out, van Ruysdael (c.1628-82) was considered "proto-Romantic in that [his] late paintings reveal a romantic sensibility in the use of mood, motifs and perspective" (Nixon, 2007, 62). Indeed, with their crashing waves, and other visible dynamic drama, the compositions seem to lack the "minor key" sentiment to which Beckett was so drawn. In fact it is the brooding *bémolisé* mood of many Dutch landscapes which drew Beckett -- an atmosphere achieved by various means according to the period of production within the seventeenth-century. In the early years, an aesthetic of calmness was achieved through tonality, while later more "realistic" paintings employed other compositional techniques, which effectively muted the scene (Fuchs, 119).[43]

Despite the artist employing the technique, Beckett certainly would have been aware of the tonal style (a mud-washed palette we see used repeatedly in his theatre and prose), and through his sensitivity to light and darkness would have been able to judge its

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the National Gallery web archive, but a painting of a similar title: *A Road Leading into a Wood* (figure 15). The London Gallery states that it was once thought to be the work of a follower from Ruysdael, but now attribute it to the artist himself (http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jacob-van-ruisdael-a-road-leading-into-a-wood).

[42] Certainly Beckett had an affinity for more derelict back-stories, such as painters who were drunks or suffered all-out destitution (or who are at least depicted as such).

[43] "A static composition, for example, might stress horizontal and vertical accents, closure at the edges of the painting, and subdued colour and tonal contrasts, to give an effect of orderliness and repose (as in Claude, for example). A more 'dynamic composition,' such as can be found in the work of Rubens, "might be based on intersecting diagonals, a lack of closure vigorous contrasts of colour and light and dark accents -- stressing movement, activity, conflict" (National Gallery web). Given this vitality associated with Rubens, who Beckett dismissed for his mastery, it is not surprising that Beckett did not appreciate his work.

proficiency of application.[44] For example, a landscape painting by the master of nocturnes, Aert van der Neer, effected a quietist aesthetic quality through the tonal style wherein he could describe a potentially dramatic incident such as a church burning in the night, as "a strongly muted incident, lost in the night" (Fuchs 119). In this painting the fire has "an aesthetic meaning only […] with no apparent cause, no consequence" (*Ibid*).[45] Aert van der Neer was a noted influence to Jens Juel, who in turn affected Friedrich. As two of his moonlit scenes were hanging in the Gemäldgalerie in Dresden during the time that Friedrich studied in Copenhagen (1794-98), it is certain that he would have seen these (Rewald, 10).

A lack of a focalized subject among (or despite) "ten thousand graphic details" (Shawe-Taylor 24), typical of Dutch seventeenth landscape painting, also contributes a neutralizing effect to a painting as the "all-overness" negates any climax to a narrative. As noted earlier, the equal treatment of staffage makes for a dispersion of subject wherein narrative fragments are scattered across the canvas, thereby confusing a focal point. Using the example of an early drawing entitled *Spaerwou* (1604) (fig. 17), by Esajas [for Esais] van de Velde in the style of Claes Janz Visscher, art historian Wolfgang Stechow explains the effect of the composition: "We are not taken by the hand and led around to admire things in succession, nor is there the slightest flavour of allegorical meaning [...]"

[44] For an example of Beckett's use of tonal style (and composition evocative of Friedrich), consider the set description for *Happy Days*: "On the tops of the wooden structure there was a surface covering of treated painted canvas, hessian, shredded string and sisal. The effect aimed at was that of scorched desert, the colour of the mound and the floor approximating to that of dried grass and scorched earth. Behind was a curved cyclorama on which hills could be seen faintly in the distance but which was dominated by an orange-coloured sky. In fact, the cyclorama became a deeper orange as it went higher and grew paler in colour as it came down to meet the stage and the earth" (Knowlson 1985, 3). The ultimate effect of Winnie's mound takes on a Seghers-like geological texture.

[45] Here Fuchs is referring to *Burning Church* by a contemporary of Salomon van Ruysdael, Aert van der Neer (1603/04-77). I was not able to locate this painting in my search, to include in the annex of paintings. See fig. 16 for another example of Van der Neer's nocturnal landscapes.

(Stechow, 20). Here order is replaced by a concomitant quality or synthesis, where parts create a whole without necessarily being in direct contact with one another. Never much for hand-holding, the description above could be extended to much of Beckett's work and "staffage" in Beckett becomes reduced as his prose and theatre become increasingly spare, so that at times there is only a solitary figure in a neutralized landscape.

Perhaps then it is no surprise that in Beckett's later works we find reference to the "divine landscapes" of the Northern Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich, whose reduced tableaux often feature a solitary figure facing a void. The reductionism which Friedrich famously employed (and accelerated), finds precursors in later paintings by Jacob van Ruisdael, such as the *Great Beech Forest* (or alternate title*, The Large Forest*), where human activity appears only in traces and is replaced by repose as a single wanderer rests in the shade of towering trees (fig. 18).[46]

In the context of painting, Wolfgang Stechow asserts that "the topic of staffage naturally brings up the problem of the whole relationship between man and nature in seventeenth-century Holland in painting as well as in general. A Dutch painting of that period without any figures is a phenomenon of great rarity. [...] But even in the most 'romantic' examples -- works by Seghers, Rembrandt, Everdingen, Ruisdael -- complete lack of staffage is an exception" (Stechow 8).[47] Stechow interprets the consistency of staffage figures in landscapes, which distinguishes the Dutch landscapes from those of the Romantic era:

> First of all, it means that man does not lose himself in nature, that there is no attempt at the glorification or deification of nature as something beyond

[46] This resting wanderer hunched in repose calls to mind Dante's Belacqua, the most unambitious of wanders.

[47] Indeed "romantic" written within quotation marks, suggesting not a full-fledged strain of the sentiment, becomes a defining term in Beckett's aesthetic.

> man's scope or control. A herdsman with cattle, a hunter of rabbits, a traveller on horseback talking to a man on foot, and, in marines, the crews of sailing and rowing boats -- these are the figures that animate the typical Dutch seventeenth-century landscape of the mature period, i.e. after biblical mythological and allegorical staffage had ceded its prominent place to the 'everyday' conception of landscape. It is an animation which rarely involves a story; if the story is important the figures are apt to predominate over the landscape as they often do in depictions of folk festivals, battle engagements, robberies and so on. But it is an animation which provides a human scale; it prevents the widest panorama, tallest trees and wildest seas from growing beyond man's compass and comprehension. (*Ibid* 8)

Dutch Low Life: Brouwer (dear) Brouwer

The description of the "wildest seas [...] growing beyond man's compass" brings to mind the work of J.M.W. Turner, an artist of the "major key" sublime with his frothing and angry seascapes. John Ruskin, who was a champion of Turner argued the superiority of "modern landscapists" (in particular Turner), over the Dutch masters, whom he accused of pictorial convention and lack of truth to nature:

> A Dutch picture is, in fact, merely a Florentine table [made in *pietra dura*] more finely touched... and perhaps the fairest view one can take of a Dutch painter, is that he is a respectable tradesman furnishing well-made articles in oil paint: but when we begin to examine the design of these articles, we may see immediately that it has inbred vulgarity, and not the chance of fortune, which has made him a tradesman and kept him one. (Shawe-Taylor 16)

That Beckett and Ruskin offered contesting opinions on the merits of Dutch landscapes is not surprising given Beckett's generally dismissive attitude towards Romanticism; it is likely that Turner's dramatic seascapes would hold little interest for him. However, Ruskin was not the only critic of the work of the seventeenth-century Dutch masters, and indeed the tradition was not short of negative commentary particularly among

nineteenth-century aesthetes. Laments the nineteenth-century French painter and writer, Eugene Fromentin:

> Note, moreover, that even in their really anecdotic or picturesque painting we cannot see the least sign of anecdote. There is no well-determined subject, no action requiring a thoughtful, expressive, or particularly significant composition; no invention, not a scene that breaks the monotony of this country or town life, which is so dull, commonplace, devoid of learning, of passion, one might say of sentiment. Drinking, smoking, dancing, kissing the maids can scarcely be called either rare or attractive incidents. Milking cows, taking them to water, loading a cart with hay – these are not remarkable scenes in an agricultural country. (Shawe –Taylor, 24)

If a Dutch subject was to be discerned, however reticently by such critics as Fromentin, it was often of "low genre." Horace Walpole (1717-1797) claimed the Dutch to be "drudging Mimics of Nature's most uncomely coarseness"(qtd. in Shawe-Taylor 16). Although Dutch landscapes of the seventeenth-century were considered by critics to be an art form which could only appeal to the "untutored eye" of Dutch merchants, these "Mimics of Nature" succeeded in catching the eye of George IV, whose appreciation for Dutch landscapes was thought to reflect recent French fashion (Shawe-Taylor, 14). Regency admiration for art of the seventeenth century inflated the price of works by particular artists deemed of the "finest manner," such as Rembrandt and Philips Wouwerman. High prices for low subjects rendered with fine technique made Dutch landscape painting, for some critics, a paradoxical or even blasphemous enterprise. Agitated by what seemed a betrayal of subject and practice, Walpole complains in a letter (1779) that the Dutch "thought a man vomiting a good joke; and would not have grudged a week on finishing a belch, if mere labour and patience could have compassed it" (qtd. in Shawe-Taylor 16).[48]

[48] Horace Walpole letter to Horace Mann, 12 November 1779.

Whereas Walpole rejects the baser of the bodily functions as thematics worthy of contemplation, throughout his oeuvre Beckett pays close attention to the betrayals of time or environment on the human body, causing such discomforts as "cramps [...] corns and hammertoes" (*More Pricks than Kicks*, 8), while not going quite as far as Joyce in describing base bodily functions. As well, much of Beckett's work describes the very environment that Fromentin dismisses, that is the dull monotony of "being" (the inherently *bémolisé* of human existence). "The great task of the artist," Beckett told scholar Lawrence E. Harvey (around 1961-62), "is to express being and [he saw] being as a collection of meaningless 'movements'" (qtd. in Knowlson and Knowlson, 134). The quotidian is filled with such empty and repetitive gestures, which the Dutch (as well as Beckett) felt worthy subject matter. However, that the Dutch depicted low-life scenes was not an indication of a liberalness or an extension of empathy for the marginalized -- in general low-life pictures were purchased by the Dutch bourgeois who could, in contemplating this baser scene, take pleasure in their own respective wealth.

The "vulgarity" of topic Fromentin, Walpole, and Ruskin complain of could easily be applied to the small panels painted by Adriaen Brouwer (c.1605 -1638), a Flemish painter who, along with Pieter Bruegel (whom Beckett also mentions in his German diaries) specialized in satirical depictions of tavern and low-life scenes. Beckett admired "Brouwer, dear Brouwer" (GD, 5 February 1937)[49] for his paintings of revelry (i.e. drinking and smoking, and the resultant bar brawls), as for his melancholic nocturnes. Beckett's affinity for Brouwer is long-standing as we find mention of him in the letters and diaries of the 1930s and again some twenty years later. Notably the letter

[49] Qtd. in Nixon 2011, 143.

to Duthuit (3 January 1951) describes a tonal *bémolisé* landscape evocative of Friedrich's *Graveyard under Snow* (fig. 19):

> Impossible to do anything with the earth, half frozen, half muddy. I long to be digging, digging over as they say here. Went for a long walk yesterday, met no one, -- yes, I did, a gravedigger coming out of a cemetery pushing a wheelbarrow. Halfway along, large dump, Brouwer-style inn, peasants talking their heads off, drinking wine till it was time for an aperitif. (*Letters Vol. 2*, 217)

As Wilenski describes, Brouwer was a regular patron of alehouses, and it is behind one of these establishments in Antwerp that Wilenski claims the artist was found dead in 1638.[50] In the Dutch tradition of drawing subject matter "from life," Brouwer likely based many of his small panels of merrymaking on experience (or what he could recall of it), which he then rendered with increasingly masterful style and application of tonal values. Known as the "Villon of Holland," Brouwer, as Wilenski describes, was a founder of the low-life tradition of painting, which developed in seventeenth-century Holland (214):

> Nearly all the pictures ascribed to him show peasants in low dens; hardly any show peasants in their homes. The Dutch or Flemish peasants in his pictures are poor, stunted creatures, the debris of half a century of war. They wear torn and dirty garments and congregate in conditions of misery and filth. Sometimes they try to overcome the gloom of their surroundings with the stimulant of raw spirits, sometimes they break into a coarse and discordant chorus, but most frequently they have fled to the narcotic of tobacco and we see them completely stupefied or half-way to that state. (214)

We can easily imagine a satirized bleary-eyed Brouweresque character lurking in the background of many a Beckett story. For example, the public-house where Belacqua is

[50] There is some discrepancy as to Brouwer's cause of death – Shawe-Taylor, for example, claims that Brouwer may have been a victim of the plague. Whether there were other hypotheses offered in Beckett's time, it is certain that Wilenski's account would be the most appealing in terms of Beckett's affinity for the "authentically tragic figure."According to Wilenski, Brouwer's death was a conclusion to a series of unfortunate events: at the age of 16 he ran from home to Amsterdam, from there he went to Haarlem, and apprenticed to the abusive Frans Hals for six years, on his return to Antwerp he was imprisoned for an unrecorded offence, and some years later found dead behind a tavern (Wilenski 214).

"tolerated" in "Ding-Dong" is peopled with "rough but kindly habitués [...] recruited for the most part from among dockers, railway men and vague joxers on the dole" (*More Pricks than Kicks*, 35). The establishment itself is *animized* in meticulous detail, evocative of the "glimmering riches in a hazy atmosphere"[51] of a Wouwerman painting.

> Sitting in this crapulent den, drinking his drink, he gradually ceased to see its furnishings with pleasure, the bottles, representing centuries of loving research, the stools, the counter, the powerful screws, the shining of the pulls of the beer-engines, all cunningly devised and elaborated to further the relations between purveyor and consumer in this domain. The bottles drawn and emptied in a twinkling, the casks responding to the slightest pressure on their joysticks, the weary proletarians at rest on B.T.M and elbow, the cash register that never complains, the graceful curates flying from customer to customer, all this made up a spectacle in which Belacqua was used to take delight and chose to see a pleasant instance of machinery decently subservient to appetite. (*More Pricks than Kicks*, 36)

Indeed the "wearisome tactics of gress"-- the insignificant yet obligatory movements of the conscious being, is a subject that receives great treatment by Dutch painters, even those not necessarily associated with the low-life genre of tavern scenes. "Gress" in the Dutch landscape is either charted in its moving form or the pause between that movement, and the slouched figure of repose is a common personality, as are beggars of all descriptions (Shawe-Taylor 48). For example, Haarlem painter Isaac Van Ostade, (1621-1649) (another short-lived painter of the time) is celebrated by Desmond Shawe-Taylor for his representation of the "cheerful domestication of the satirical depiction of peasant life seen in Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Adriaen Brouwer" (48). Van Ostade's painting, *Travellers Outside an Inn* (fig.20) is done in the trademark palette of the tonal school of the 1610s and 1620s, as if everything has been "marinated in mud" (*Ibid*).

[51] A description that Wouwerman's biographer Brigit Schumacher applies to his work. See Schumacher web.

Desmond Shawe-Taylor describes this painting:

> The meaning of this scene is appropriately conveyed by these frugal means [...] The bourgeois couple (the only ones wearing bright colours or distinct blacks and whites) have taken a byroad where they stop at a down-at-heel inn, staffed by harmless drudges whose forms are submerged in the sludgy light and whose round backs resemble the beasts of burden. A beggar shuffles on wooden blocks and hand-held pattens... (*Ibid*).

In the brief captioning of this painting, we can see motifs and effects that very much describe Beckett's repertoire of tramps, beggars or loiterers from *More Pricks*, past *Godot*; characters who find momentary repose from dislocation in a similar "sludgy light" atmosphere.

Familiar with Brouwer's biography, likely through Wilenski's *Introduction to Dutch Art,* where he is described as a "bohemian [...] who spent any money that came his way on tobacco and drink" (213), Beckett, as Nixon describes, felt Brouwer represented the very antithesis of the "competent" artist in that he was a "taugenichts [good-for-nothing] & no more" (SB to TM, 18 January 1937). Moreover, "Brouwer's paintings incorporated the two aspects of Dutch painting that impressed Beckett, the "minor key" depiction of landscapes and the minute details that implied distinct narratives; it is often the figure in the background that catches his attention rather than the main theme of the painting" (Nixon 2011, 143). Brouwer is said to have been an influence on Rembrandt, and having died before this great master, escaped the romantic attitude that would have given his work a different complexion (Wilenski, 219).

Indeed, we have touched upon Beckett's eye for the background, but the interpretation of Brouwer as the antithesis of the competent artist is somewhat misleading, as Wilenski clarifies:

> ...Brouwer himself was something more than a drugged and drunken sot. He was an original descriptive artist, with the power to observe intensely and record his observations. He also had great sensibility and an eye for architectural form. He painted in the thin glaze technique of the Flemings, Brueghel and Rubens, combined with tints mixed up on the palette in the new manner of Hals; he drew with style and precision and his colour is varied and subtle. (Wilenski, 217)

Wilenski describes Brouwer as an "exceptional figure in Dutch art, who depicted 'exceptional peasants'"[52] – "'smoke drunkards' escaping the dreariness of life through the intoxicating effects of tobacco."[53] As Wilenski astutely notes: "The smokers depicted by Brouwer are thus not the normal Netherlandish peasants of the time, but eccentric degenerates addicted to a special vice" (215).[54] This narcotic effect to the painting adds something of silence to an otherwise raucous scene of alcoholic carousing: Beckett's taste for Brouwer demonstrates his continued appreciation for quietism even in scenes of debauchery.

Philips Wouwerman: The Adoration of Solitude

Beckett's German diaries reveal the internal accumulation of images during his journey, which coloured and composed his view of lived experience. His entries contain, in Dutch fashion, minute details that delicately render the quotidian while minding attention to background: "Suddenly with mist fallingly wonderful red light like an extension of the leaves that a group of women are raking together, against the grey néant

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[52] In this statement Wilenski compares Brouwer in to other low-life painters, such as Van Ostade, Jan Steen and Molenaer, all of whom depicted "normal peasants and small tradesmen." Brouwer's paintings of "exceptional peasants" appealed mostly in his lifetime to artists and dilettanti, while depictions of "normal peasants" had a wider market appeal (211).

[53] Wilenski notes that the paintings show that the tobacco smoked by these peasants was more like opium than the tobacco of today; "and that the smoking of such tobacco was a definite vice practised in especially low taverns or tobacco dens. The stupefying effects of this tobacco were due either to the strong nature of the actual leaf or to admixture, by the vendors, of other narcotic ingredients -- hemp, coltsfoot, or belladonna -- to make the supplies go further" (215).

[54] See figure 21 for Brouwer's *Smokers in an Inn*.

of the Jungfernsee" (GD, 12 January 1937).[55] This description illustrates the kind of still and evocative mood to which Beckett was drawn in paintings, and for this reason was particularly fond of the "lyrical" landscapes – "the solitary riders & resting scenes" (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 142). Philips Wouwerman is the painter with whom Beckett associates such scenes of rest and solitude;[56] motifs which were later adapted in a different tone (one of salvation lost) by Friedrich, whose travelers move solely by their own volition.

As Knowlson describes, during Beckett's German visit in 1936-37, the Hamburger Kunsthalle became a haven for him, much as the National Gallery had been in London two years before, and it was here that he finds the Wouwerman "magic" [i.e. Reiter an der Düne],[57] among others (Knowlson 1996, 234):

> Initially disappointed, his interest was then captured by the excellent Dutch and Flemish collections, especially paintings by van Goyen, Everdingen, Elsheimer, Wouwerman and van der Neer.[58] On the other hand, the German Romantics like Graff, von Kobell, Feuerbach, and Böcklin, even Menzel, filled him 'mainly with loathing': he dismissed a whole room of Philip Otto Runge as 'Quatsch' (rubbish). [...]Surprisingly, he made no comment at all at this time on the gallery's dozen Caspar David Friedrichs, and artist for whom he later developed tremendous admiration. (234)

Philips Wouwerman (c.1619 - 1668) was a Haarlem-born artist, who spent his life there, with a brief visit to Hamburg in 1638 or 1639 (Shawe-Taylor, 51). His early work is described by Desmond Shawe-Taylor as "reminiscent of that of Isaac van Ostade and the influence of the Haarlem tonal school persists throughout his career in effects of soft light filtered through misty skies and in the thinly painted areas allowing brown

[55] Qtd. in Nixon 2011, 142.
[56] Nixon 201, 142.
[57] I was not able to locate a painting with this title. See fig. 22 for a solitary scene by Wouwerman that Beckett may have appreciated and likely saw in the Gemäldegalerie Berlin.
[58] I will further discuss Van der Neer under the topic of nocturnes and his influence on Friedrich.

underpaint to show. His later work has bluer skies, and a more silvery overall tonality as well as including more elegant figures" (*Ibid*).

While it is obvious that the mood of "resting" landscapes would appeal to Beckett, his taste for Wouwerman presents an exception to his preference for artistic ignorance over skill and his fondness for the destitute and drunken artist.[59] As was previously mentioned both Wouwerman and Rembrandt were favoured by the "refined and professional taste" of the regency of George IV.[60] Wouwerman was by all accounts a very successful and prolific artist, who left his family a substantial fortune. Wouwerman's biographer Dr. Birgit Schumacher describes him as a "fashion painter" contributing his success to his ability to read and satisfy his collectors' tastes and to subsequently produce works that reflected "their aesthetic requirements and social circumstances" (Schumacher web). This approach rests in opposition to that of Seghers, who produced works quite outside of the conventional tastes of the Dutch clientele -- we might say that Wouwerman was a true commercial artist and painted subjects that ranged from pastoral scenes to those of hunts or battles, according to demand. Although Beckett may not have approved of the more active scenes, one could imagine he enjoyed Wouwerman's depiction of beggars, along with his tendency to not filter out the peripheral activities of minor characters, to whom he often gave a humorous centre stage. For example, *Calvary at a Sutler's Booth* (fig. 23) is an active scene which takes place on the outskirts of a soldiers' camp. The subject of the painting, as Shawe-Taylor notes, is

[59] Indeed James Knowlson in "Beckett in the Musée Condé" (2001) confirms that Beckett's taste for Wouwermans was not consistent.
[60] See page 14 of Shawe-Taylor's *Dutch Landscapes* for the complete list of artists preferred by the regency such as,"Paulus Potter, Adriaen and Willem van de Velde, Jan Both and to a lesser extent Jan van der Heyden, Nicolaes Berchem, Karel du Jardin and Cornelis van Poelenburgh. The taste for Jacob van Ruisdael, Meyndert Hobbema and Aelbert Cuyp was of slightly more recent date but well established by 1800."

that of the braggart or swaggerer and the scene features a small black dog defecating in the foreground "as if to underline the point that these are dung-heap champions" (52). Indeed both dogs and dung heaps feature prominently in the works of Beckett and this particular Wouwerman composition recalls an excerpt from *How It Is* where the accompanying dog engaged in its routine of motion is worthy of some attention:

> ...brief black and there we are again on the summit the dog askew on its hunker in the heather it lowers its snout to its black and pink penis too tired to lick it we on the contrary again about turn introrse fleeting face to face transfer of things swinging of arms silent relishing of sea and isles heads pivoting as one to the city fumes silent location of steeples and towers heads back front as though on an axle. (*How it Is,* 33)

Beckett, like the Dutch, did not filter out the detritus of peripheral quotidian movement -- goings on that certainly make up life, but are often excluded in narrative. Seeing the visual arts through a Schopenhaueresque lens, Beckett had once commented on the emotive power of Dutch still lifes, which presented the beholder with "the peaceful still, frame of mind of the artist, free from will, which was needed to contemplate such insignificant things so objectively" (*WWI*, 1.2 #38, 255).[61] This same agency could also be attributed to the pleasant scenes of the Dutch landscapes, which granted viewers a meditative assessment of the insignificant acts constituting an average day in the countryside where man and nature exist in harmony. Such mundance or "insignficant" acts were of constant fascination to Beckett, and through him the reader is granted a similar meditiation on the repetitious gestures of existence in a world indifferent to man.

[61] Qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarksi, 21.

Adam Elsheimer: Light in the Darkness

There were the three zones, light, half-light, dark, each with its specialty.

(*Murphy,* 111)[62]

There are limits. Back in that kind of light.

("Texts for Nothing")[63]

On 18 January 1937, Beckett writes a letter from Berlin to Tom MacGreevy, which contains a lengthy discussion on art, a mention of music, and a scattering of life events. With a vocabulary increasingly saturated by visual imagery resulting from prolific visits to galleries, the topics are rendered through a painterly language of landscape. He describes the horn in Beethoven's late middle piano concerto, *Leonore* as "innaccessibly [sic] distant, sylvan and autumn dusk". The Sanssouci summer house is "exquisite": "The shallow green dome not so much rising from the gently bayed centre as resting on it is to a hair the mock heroic that is fitting and with the long low yellow front the chord of just the right interval" (*Letters Vol. 1,* 431). In the letter, the conversation on art is wide-ranging, but at the core of it is a critique of the night landscapes on view at the Kaiser Friedrich:

> The usual acres of Titain [for Titian] at his best, if you like that kind of thing, I haven't been able to look at him for very long this trip. The Rembrandts and Halses must be the best outside Holland, if you like that sort of thing. 6 or 7 Brouwers in the dark corner that is always reserved for him, with the first landscapes that have seemed to me to belong to his spirit. The famous moon landscape, that belonged to Rubens, is of course denied me, having been sent to Paris for the Rembrandt & Contemporaries

[62] Gordon S. Armstrong suggests that in "Beckett's triad of forms […] dark is a will-less state of absolute freedom; half-light admits of contemplation (during which time Murphy is free to move as he pleases 'from one place to another'); and light is the simple experience of the physical state recollected in memory" (Armstrong, 222).

[63] *The Complete Short Prose*, 105.

> exhibition.[64] Very good Terborchs, including a surprising loose bright free courtyard scene, say the Terborch Kupplerin. The two Vermeers and De Hooch looking very trivial & Ma[e]s beside them. And Elsheimers, "pictures" and miniatures and a lovely drawing on loan from the Louvre, water, night, wood, glades, moon and a tiny fire being kindled on the shore. (*Ibid,* 429)

A footnote to this letter describes the Elsheimer painting as a gouache entitled *Evening Landscape* (Louvre 18, 658),[65] on loan from the Louvre (November 1936); however the elements that Beckett mentions could apply to almost any of Elsheimer's nocturnes. The first to treat the moonlit night as a subject in itself, rather than solely as a backdrop for religious or mythological narratives, for Elsheimer nature held its own divinity (a theme we will again see taken up with Friedrich). Wolfgang Stechow traces the "essential" origins of the Dutch night landscape to Elsheimer (174), although many Netherlandish artists would come to know his work mainly through the reproductive engravings of Hendrick Goudt (as was the case with Seghers). That Beckett shows affinity for this artist, known almost exclusively as a painter, is proof of his eye for the pioneering spirit, the experimentalist, the "modern" perspective. Although Stechow stresses that Elsheimer's influence on Dutch landscape painting has a tendency to be overemphasized, he certainly provided the model of effect for many of the artists whom Beckett admired, and in this sense becomes the standard against which all others became measured in his minor key depiction of even the most dramatic events.[66]

Nocturnes, despite the suggestion of darkness, are very much a showcase of light; exercises which tested an artist's technical skill in the rendering of various light effects in

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[64] The Brouwer landscape was *Dune Landscape in Moonlight* (KF 853B), once owned by Rembrandt was on loan for the Paris exhibition "La Peinture flamande:Rubens et son temps" at the Musée de l'Orangerie (November-December 1936) (*Letters Vol.1*, 435). See figure 24.
[65] I was not able to locate this image.
[66] For example, David Teniers the Elder was apparently a pupil of Elsheimer. Hercules Seghers also did works after Elsheimer (*Tobias and the Ange*l, for example)(Freedberg, 30).

the dark, such as the moon, stars, comets, open fires, torches and lanterns (Croke and Waiboer Web). Night scenes and candlelight effects were not an innovation of the Dutch, but were already developed by the Italians, such as Raphael and Elsheimer's contemporary Caravaggio.[67] However, using Elsheimer's *Flight into Egypt* as an example, Wilenski explains that his use of light went beyond the pure decoration and architecture of the Italians' application: "In Elsheimer's picture we find for the first time a night effect used to symbolize a *mood* "(Wilenski 63). Elsheimer, who often had no less than three sources of light in any one of his compositions, is a master of luminary effects, which as we will see cast the overall mood of his paintings, despite any dramatic content, with a stilling hue of the minor key. As such, we could consider Elsheimer a forerunner in the development of *atmosphere*.

With so much of Beckett's prose or theatre taking place at dusk or in darkness, and his later theatre so starkly spot-lit, it is not surprising that he would express fondness for night landscapes, and Adam Elsheimer, a German-born artist of the seventeenth century, produced some of the most celebrated nocturnes in Northern European art.[68] Elsheimer's importance goes beyond his impeccable nocturnes and indeed much could be said about this influential artist of the seventeenth-century. However, for the purpose of this paper, we will consider the qualities most relevant to Beckett's interest and application, such as Elsheimer's rendering of light in the dark, his unique ("minor key")

[67] Ackerley and Gontarski point out that of particular interest to Beckett was Wilenski's discussion of "the Caravaggio-Honthorst tradition" of spotlight effects, particularly in the in painting of Gerrit van Honthorst" (Ackerley and Gontarski xi). Notably, the chapter on Honthorst in Wilenski's book directly precedes the one on Elsheimer.

[68] Other notable painters of night landscapes, who were subsequently influenced by Elsheimer are Rubens, Rembrandt, and Aert van der Neer (Croke and Waiboer, Web).

narrative treatment, and his ability to create a moody atmosphere which positions him as a precursor of the nineteenth-century Romantic period.

Having studied the Dutch seventeenth-century masters, Beckett would have been aware of Elsheimer's importance to the Dutch tradition in introducing a new perspective or a new conception of pictorial space translated through a subdued language, which even Rubens was to appreciate.[69] Although it is difficult to say whether Beckett was introduced to Elsheimer through Wilenski's *Introduction to Dutch Art*, which MacGreevy suggested he read in 1933,[70] it is obvious through the comments he makes on this artist that Wilenski's interpretation made a lasting impression on him. Wilenski's book is full of narrative charm, offering astute observations on works themselves, but also includes anecdotal treatment of the background stories of the artists, who thus take on the vitality of prose characters. Elsheimer is an obvious darling in Wilenski's summary of the Dutch seventeenth-century and is treated very much as a late-sung hero of art history, and father to the Romantic artists of the nineteenth century. To this end, Wilenski cites Elsheimer's "romantic effort," which he believes culminates in Rembrandt, as one of the most significant in addition to the Italian post-Raphaelite and Baroque efforts in Italy (55).

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[69] Keith Andrews notes,"yet even the exuberant Rubens, was on occasion impressed by the more subdued language of Elsheimer. *Judith and Holofernes* is a case in point. Here a scene of horror is toned down to an almost domestic calm, with dim candle-light"(Andrews 41). See figures 25 and 26 for a comparison of the version of this painting by Elsheimer and that by Rubens.

[70] Beckett wrote to MacGreevy (8 October 1932), asking him to recommend "an informative book on Dutch painting"(*Letters Vol.1*, 129). Beckett took notes from Wilenski, which are in a notebook that includes lists of paintings from London Collections held at the Beckett Archive, Reading University, MS 5001 (Coulter, 32).

Being a notably melancholic artist, who died at the young age of 32 after contracting a fatal illness during a period of incarceration in debtors prison,[71] Elsheimer represents the model of the tragic artist to whom Beckett was consistently attracted. Upon his death, Rubens, who Wilenski describes as "a man of action," is said to have criticized Elsheimer for his laziness, which amounted to a waste of talent and a loss of opportunity for economic profit. However, Wilenski regards the charge of laziness as unwarranted:

> …looking at the variety of work which Elsheimer produced in his short life, and the enlargements of experience which it represents, it seems more probable that he was not so much a lazy man as a man of thought rather than of action, a man driven more to ponder on the nature of art than to turn out pictures; and his character would, of course, not only account for his inability to cope with material affairs, but also for his position as the centre of an artistic circle, where his influence was exerted as much by the spoken word as by the examples of his pictures. (Wilenski, 59)

Indeed the melancholic Elsheimer is the stuff of legend; an artist of relatively low production[72] about whom little is known and many assumptions are made so that he somewhat misleadingly receives the title of "painter-poet" (Andrews, 13).[73] Such characteristics as a bird's eye view of undulating hills or dense fantastic woodland scenery, highly emulated by younger artists, led to Elsheimer being interpreted as "a 'romantic' interpreter of nature" (Freedberg 30). And it is the preconceived notion of what constitutes Elsheimer's oeuvre, which has contributed to numerous erroneous attributions of authorship. As art historian Keith Andrews points out:

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[71] Purportedly, Elsheimer was put in prison by Hendrick Goudt (a pupil and patron of Elsheimer who lived with him in Rome), when he failed to produce a sufficient amount of work. However, no documentary proof has ever been found. See Andrews,13.

[72] The smallness of Elsheimer's oeuvre is due partly to the fact that he died young and that smaller pictures are more easily lost than larger ones (Wilenski, 60).

> The chief element was a highly poetical rendering of nature, usually woodland scenery by the light of the moon or the sun or some artificial source of light, and this was thought to have come from the sixteenth century 'Frankenthal School,' a group of Netherlandish refugee painters who had settled in Frankenthal, not far from Frankfurt, Elsheimer's birthplace. Elsheimer was seen as one of their followers, imitating their style with tiny figures subservient, yet contributing, to an overall effect. Such poetry was also thought to have been evoked at times -- mostly in a series of gouache drawings -- by a representation of pure landscape, incorporating only a few, if any, figures. (9)

Andrews touches upon a number of qualities to which Beckett would have been attracted: the nocturnal setting and the rendering of light in the darkness, as well as the reduction of figures in "pure" (or unsentimentalized) landscape are very much traits of the Beckett canon. In later works, man is all but erased, and "nature" is replaced by "atmosphere," reduced to its essential elements of light, colour and space, in a fracturing of the mystical communion thought possible by the Romantics. A similar disintegration of elements occurs in Beckett's "Fizzles 8: For to end yet again," as the landscape is obscured by a film of dust so that topography becomes covered by its own degenerated form, filtering the light into tonal hues and hiding the ruins so exalted by painters of the Romantic movement:

> Grey cloudless sky grey sand as far as eye can see long desert to begin. Sand pale as dust ah but dust indeed deep to engulf the haughtiest monuments which too it once was here and there. There in the end same gray invisible to any other eye stark erect amidst his ruins the expelled. Same grey all that little body from head to feet sunk ankle deep were it not for the eyes last bright of all. The arms still cleave to the trunk and to each other the legs made for flight. Grey cloudless sky ocean of dust not a ripple mock confines verge upon verge hell air not a breath. ("Fizzles:8")[74]

[74] *The Complete Short Prose,* 245

Ruins and deserts (or shoreline seascapes) figure prominently in Beckett's postwar writing,[75] influenced by his five-year experience as part of the Resistance cell, "Gloria SMH" in Paris and his humanitarian work in devastated Saint-Lô directly afterward. Indeed, says James Knowlson, "The war years as a whole had a profound effect on Beckett […] many of the features of his later prose and plays arise directly from his experiences of radical uncertainty, disorientation, exile, hunger and need" (Knowlson 1995, 351).[76] Textual landscape was certainly one of the features affected by these wartime experiences, and the three-story cyle, "The Expelled," "The Calmative," and "The End" (all written in 1946), are probably the most representive of the horrific wartime conditions of Vichy France (Perloff, 2005). The desolate image consistent in all three, is further reinforced by the subjects' static range of movement from prone position to concealment to a gothic walk in an emptied wasteland:

> Perhaps it's just ruins, a ruined folly, on the skirts of the town, in a field, for the fields come right up to our walls, their walls, and the cows lie down at night in the lee of the ramparts. I have changed refuge so often, in the course of my rout, that now I can't tell between dens and ruins. ("The Calmative")[77]

In a way that recalls Elsheimer's development of the "minor key" moment in grand narrative, these stories investigate the eerie vacancy of war's aftermath or the

[75] Motifs of deserts and ruins were commonly treated by artists of the Dutch seventeenth century and by the Romantic painters of the nineteenth century.

[76] Beckett's first published essay in French after the war was a piece of art criticism in *Cahiers d'Art* (1946, the essay probably written in 1945). The essay was entitled "La Peinture des van Velde or the world and the pair of trousers," and in it Beckett attacks the artifice in art and art criticism. Knowlson points out that although highly idiosyncratic, the essay "raises fundamental issues concerning the relationship of the painter to the world" (Knowlson 1996, 358). It also initiates a concern that Beckett will consider in a similar context in a subsequent essay on the van Veldes in 1948 on "the visible thing, the pure object and with their approach to subject and object, reality and representation. As with his earlier comments on Paul Cézanne and Jack Yeats's paintings, his essay tells us more about his own approach to art than it does about the van Veldes' painting" (358).

[77] *The Complete Short Prose,* 62.

psychological tension in the silence of hiding or grappling with loss, rather than focusing on the noise and excitement of mortar and gunshell. In emphasis of postwar desolation, these texts contain few characters, similar also to what we witness in the works of Elsheimer. Elsheimer's reduction of the figure foreshadows similar minimization of staffage in Hercules Seghers and Caspar David Friedrich; an emptying out of the canvas that injects the feeling of the sublime. Beckett employs a similar tactic as his later works become increasingly minimal and man is nudged closer to the edge of the void -- from *Texts for Nothing* on, Beckett's "characters" would be little more than a dislocated "'bodiless voices' or later 'voiceless bodies'" (Pilling, xxv):

> Window between sky and earth nowhere known. Opening on a colourless cliff. The crest escapes the eye wherever set. The base as well. Framed by two sections of sky forever white. Any hint in the sky at a land's end? The yonder ether? Of sea birds no trace. Or too pale show. And then what proof of a face? None that the eye can find wherever set. ("The Cliff")[78]

"The Cliff" ("La Falaise" 1975) was originally written in French, as a tribute to painter and friend Bram van Velde, and because of this motivation, we might assume a more painterly structure to the composition. Indeed Beckett seems to play with a kind of two-dimensional depth, and despite the suggestion of the vastness of landscape beyond, a claustrophobic "pictorial space" is created as the figure because of age (or death?) appears confined to experiencing the outer world from an inner one.[79] Here the image of the figure (for whom there is no physical description) framed by the window becomes more of a ghostly self-portrait than a landscape, as the rendering is one of erasure rather

[78] *The Complete Short Prose,* 257

[79] This theme is given extended treatment by Beckett, in his grappling with the subject/object dilemma. The exterior world, as we are made to understand through art and through the works of Beckett, is ultimately experienced as an internal one. This principle also aligns with appling with the subject/object dilemma. The exterior world, as we are made to understand through art and tGestalt theory of art as expressed by Arnheim or Kepes.

than of filling. This vacancy would become a staple of Beckett's postwar aesthetic, which develops with greater force after "the revelation" Beckett experiences in his mother's room while visiting her in 1946 after a six-year absence from Ireland during the war. "In speaking of his own revelation," says Knowlson, "Beckett tended to focus on the recognition of his stupidity […] and on his concern with impotence and ignorance" (Knowlson 1995, 352). Formulating this approach with a debt to Joyce, Beckett states:

> I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding. (qtd. in *Ibid*)

From this point on, continues Knowlson, "Beckett would henceforth draw on his own inner worlds for his subjects; outside reality would be refracted through the filter of his own imagination; inner desires and needs would be allowed a much greater freedom of expression; rational contradictions would be allowed in; and the imagination would be allowed to create alternative worlds to those of conventional reality" (*Ibid*, 352-53). Although Joyce's writing may provide the most significant structure for the revelation itself, Beckett's development of more generalized or less geographically definable settings could be attributed to artists such as Elsheimer and Seghers, both of whom created less recognizably Dutch landscapes in comparison to the majority of their contemporaries who celebrated the local by including identifiable topographical or architectural signifiers.[80]

As earlier noted, Elsheimer worked in Rome alongside local post-Renaissance artists who were "attempting to enlarge their formal experience and to develop a new

[80] Elsheimer is in fact considered to have been an influence to Seghers's more alien landscapes.

conception of pictorial space" (Wilenski 56). Through contact with the Italians along with a liberal atmosphere in which to work, Elsheimer introduced a new perspective on landscape, "one less recognizably Dutch, less intimate and self-consciously rustic" (Freedberg 41); instead he composed what David Freedberg calls a "more elegiac strain of landscape, one not even potentially Dutch - except insofar as it is a landscape of pure fantasy and thus could be almost anywhere where low hills exist, dense clusters of trees, low pools of water and the occasional classical shrine" (*Ibid*). These, Freedberg explains, are the main ingredients of Elsheimer, which would come to have lasting effects on Netherlandish painting, making Elsheimer another artist with a modern approach to landscape, for whom Beckett always had an eye. Freedberg's description of Elsheimer's fantastical landscapes could also apply to Beckett's landscapes, which are often more suggestively than defineably Irish as he encourages a more secular view of landscape or "territory."

Wilenski cites a group of works by Elsheimer, which exemplifies his contributions to modern landscape painting: the *Mountain Landscape* in Brunswick (fig. 27), *The Flight into Egypt* in Vienna (fig. 28), and *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* in Munich (fig. 29) (62).[81] Wilenski considers the *Mountain Landscape* as the origins of the Romantic landscape, and it is here we may trace the beginnings of Friedrich's similarly pioneering perspective back to the sixteenth century:[82]

[81] *The Flight into Egypt* (1625/30) in Vienna is now attributed to the Dutch painter Jacob Pynas (Shaw, 229) The Uffizi Gallery states that many paintings once thought to be done by Elsheimer are now attributed to Pynas (Jacob Pynas Web). Shaw also states that Beckett likely saw this painting in the Brunswick Musuem in 1936, during one of his frequent visits to see Giorgione's self portrait. See figure 30 for Rembrandt's version of *The Flight into Egypt* (Shaw, 229).

[82] What made Friedrich's landscapes so revolutionary in the tradition of European art was the increasingly reduced canvas, culminating in *Monk by the Sea*. Leo Koerner suggests that Friedrich was exposed to Elsheimer's work by Quistorp, who gave Friedrich his first formal art instruction.

> In the Brunswick picture Elsheimer painted a landscape that at the time was new in European art. It is a landscape which is essentially the record of the artist's reaction not to form, but to a mood; it is perhaps, the first landscape in which all the constituent parts are deliberately stressed and distorted to express a sensation; it is the beginning of the art of romantic landscape as we know it in the art of Rembrandt, and later, in decadent forms, in the art of the nineteenth century in France and England. (Wilenski, 62)

In this painting, Elsheimer does away with characteristics of the Early and High Renaissance landscape, in which elements of a painting are distributed between a background and a foreground plane, with the addition of side planes to create a stage setting. In *Mountain Landscape* we enter what Wilenski terms "a world of *undefined recession*; the sky is no longer a backcloth but a symbol for boundless space, the river that passes the tree-trunk on the left disappears into undefined distance and undefined direction, and all the sections of the earth structure indicated by the light converge towards this limitless recession"(*Ibid*, 63).[83] Indeed "a world of *undefined recession*" seems a fitting descriptive to any of Beckett's later narrative or theatrical universes, in which the human form is often caught in a liminal space of displacement or drift. In Elsheimer we are introduced to the romantic feeling for infinite space, which we will again see reanimated on mountaintop and ocean shore in Friedrich.

Elsheimer couples his skill at lighting effects with an original approach to narrative, utilizing the night scene to render a kind of silence to the story. Wilenski, for example, believes that the depiction of the *Flight into Egypt* as a night scene is an innovation in itself and suggests that here "we find for the first time a night effect used to symbolize

[83] Wilenski notes, "we find the beginning of this romantic feeling for infinite space in the Patinir landscape in the National Gallery, and we find it, of course, also in the work of Leonardo da Vinci, whose scientific mind kept his romantic nostalgia in control" (63). Joachim Patinir (c. 1480-1524) was Flemish Northern Renaissance history and landscape painter. See fig. 31 for Patinir's *Flight into Egypt.*

mood" (Wilenski, 65).[84] In the Munich Gallery version, this mood is notably *bémolisé* as the figures cross a peaceful night landscape lit by the reflection of the moon on the water and a welcoming fire in the woods. And contrary to the treatment Rubens and Rembrandt will later give the characters of this scene, Elsheimer exalts no one, but injects the scene with a realism that reduces the most other-wordly themes to a quotidian status. As Andrews explains, "every story, every figure -- even the most exalted among the gods -- is interpreted in unidealized human terms, but the ordinary personages and their actions are transformed by the sublime poetic mood, and mysterious atmosphere which pervade even the humblest detail"(Andrews 33). In this excellent assessment of the *Flight into Egypt*, Andrews differentiates the treatment between Rubens and Elsheimer and typifies a quality that led Beckett to reject the former and appreciate the latter:

> It is interesting to compare the way the source of light illuminates the Holy Family in Rubens's rendering of the subject and in Elsheimer's painting, which no doubt initially inspired it. In the Rubens the light emanates from the Christ Child; in the Elsheimer it comes from a torch -- a prosaic touch of realism, which however transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. This would seem to be a paradox, seeing that Rubens had specifically chosen to emphasize the miraculous qualities of the Child, whereas, if one did not know the subject of Elsheimer's painting, the family might on the face of it appear like ordinary staffage figures. Yet it is exactly the virtual isolation of Rubens's group, with a tiny landscape backdrop filling in space, and led by two typical "baroque" angels, which makes them look more conventional than Elsheimer's more everyday group, united -- it would seem -- with part of the wide, glowing universe. (Andrews 37-38)[85]

The relevance of Elsheimer's less dramatic approach to mood towards the Beckett canon is obvious and the reduction of the "theatrical" to the quotidian exemplifies that line

[84] Beckett would have seen this painting in original form or reproduced in a book. He certainly saw Rembrandt's version, which is housed at the National Gallery in Dublin.
[85] See fig. 32 for Rubens's version of *The Flight into Egypt.*

between sentiment and sentimentality, terms by which Beckett, again, measured artistic success.

The uncertainty of the subject matter is something we will see later developed in the Dutch landscapes after Elsheimer, and is a quality that Beckett employs in his prose, where the "climax" of the story amounts to not a mountain peak, but rather a hillock otherwise lost in expanse. In "Fingal" the "climax" is a but a brief spotlight of attention cast on the episode of the motte, which occurs three-quarters of the way through the story; while in "Ill Seen Ill Said," the narrative momentum never moves past an aporic plod, "faint comings and goings" across a spectral landscape. However, contrary to the union Andrews senses in Elsheimer, a "belonging to" in Beckett is never emphasized, but rather an apartness, a distance, or an unbridgeable gap – philosophical ideas that are metaphorically topographic and which receive further treatment in mapping of solitude by Hercules Seghers.

Hercules Seghers: Edging Towards Architectonics

Sometimes it's the sea, other times the mountains, often it was the forest, the city, the plain too, I've flirted with the plain too.
("Texts for Nothing")[86]

As already noted, 1934 and 1935, a period of intense preoccupation with art amounts to an interval of intake rather than output, as Beckett wrote nothing more than a number of reviews in 1934 and published *Echo's Bones* in 1935 (Nixon 2011, 158). "Indeed," says Nixon, "the correspondence with MacGreevy shows that Beckett's

[86] *The Complete Short Prose*, 103.

thinking revolved around the aesthetic implications of writing rather than the practical process of composition" (Nixon 2011, 158). During this time, Beckett becomes particularly fascinated with Cézanne, a painter against whom he measures the Dutch masters. Again referring to the letter to Thomas MacGreevy, 8 September 1934, he writes:

> What a relief the Mont. Ste. Victoire after all the anthropomorphised landscape -- van Goyen, Avercamp, the Ruysdaels, Hobbema, even Claude, Wilson & Crome Yellow Esq., or paranthropomorphised by Watteau so that the Débarquement seems an illustration of "poursuivre ta pente pourvu qu'elle soit en montant," or hyperanthropomorphized by Rubens -- Tellus in record travail, or castrated by Corot; after all the landscape "promoted" to the emotions of the hiker, postulated as concerned with the hiker (what an impertinence, worse than Aesop & the animals), alive the way a lap or a fist (Rosa) is alive. Cézanne seems to have been the first to see landscape & state it as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever. Atomistic landscape with no velleities of vitalism, landscape with personality à la rigeur, but personality in its own terms, not in Pelman's landscapablity. (*Letters Vol.1*, 222)

Beckett is indeed correct in identifying the manner in which the Dutch landscapes cater to the hiker, as David Freedberg explains the main concerns of the Dutch landscape artists of the early period were "to produce faithful representations of natural objects and natural phenomena, and to produce recognizable views of local surroundings, the kind of environment in which one took one's walks" (Freedberg 15).[87] Based on this summary, we can see that Seghers's quietly rendered inhospitable terrains, which seem to overwhelm or even erase the walker, exist outside the norm. Notably, Beckett's assessment of landscape in terms of the hiker in Cézanne coincides with his reading of

[87] In this case Freedberg is referring to the seventeenth-century prints, which precede the painting tradition of landscapes. However, the statement could apply to both genres.

Rousseau,[88] whom he labels "an authentically tragic figure."[89] His letter to MacGreevy on 16 September 1934 continues the conversation on Cézanne and concludes with an assessment of Rousseau under similar terms of traverse:

> I haven't yet read the Contrat, but I suppose Emile at least is an attempt to resolve the dichotomy or make the passage between its terms less of a gauntlet & more of a right-of-way. But always the background of the promeneur solitaire, micturating without fear or favour in a décor that does not demand to be entertained [...] (*Letters Vol.1,* 228)

Both Cézanne and Rousseau are important figures to bear in mind upon entering the topic of Hercules Seghers, whose "imaginary" landscapes often feature a *promeneur solitaire* "lost" in haunting territory devoid of the celebrated lushness and tranquility of the Dutch countryside, which make up the pleasant and commercial versions of typical landscape paintings and prints of the time. As a precursor to Cézanne, Seghers, like Beckett, resists the animising mode, and here the stroll in the countryside becomes a walk through wasteland (recalling the discussion of Beckett's postwar texts above). Similar to Cézanne, Seghers creates a sense of landscape that is "*atomistic*, *mineral* and *inorganic,"* (qtd. in Ackerley, 79) unlike the later Dutch works that depict "pleasant views" of the realistic bloom and wilt of flora and fauna. The impression that a Seghers print leaves is one of geology rather than botany -- his is not a vital world of flux, where the earth gives and receives, but one of a more static or resistant nature, where the crust cracks and breaks into canyon and cliff. Rather than depicting a crashing "major mode" romantic version of tectonics à la Turner, one in which the landscape "threatens or destroys,"

[88] Mark Nixon: "Beckett's interest in the French writer was as an autobiographer, not the sociologist or philosopher. By his own admission he did not read Rousseau's *Du contrat social*, but rather the *Confessions*, the *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire*, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Heloise,* and *Emile*. This necessity to write about the self, and the resulting tension inherent in '[b]eing forced to speak in spite of myself, I am also obliged to conceal myself', undoubtedly interested Beckett (Rousseau 1953, 263)" (Nixon, 2011 21).
[89] Letter to Thomas MacGreevy, 16 September 1934 (*Letters Vol.1*, 80).

Seghers shows the land bared of decor in a distinctly minor key version of romanticism. Similarly Beckett creates such an arid "ruinstrewn land" through which one moves with "panic steps" in "Fizzle 3: [Afar a bird]":

> Ruinstrewn land, he has trodden it all night long, I gave up, hugging the hedges, between road and ditch, on the scant grass, little slow steps, no sound, stopping ever and again, every ten steps say, little wary steps, to catch his breath, then listen… (*The Complete Short Prose,* 232)

This composition of a solitary figure wandering in a barren land recalls the theme of Leopardi's "Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'asia,"[90] which, according to Chris Ackerley, "invokes the litttleness of the human spirit against the immensity of the desert and waste"(79).[91] Ackerley also credits the Leopardi poem as inspiration for the primal scene of *Watt*, however, Seghers may supply a more convincing inspiration for the alienation experienced by Watt in a world unsympathetic to his after-birth vulnerability; as created in Seghers's landscapes, Watt's world is static and indifferent, one that subsumes rather than embraces.

Seghers arranged these fantastical landscapes with a very clear logic of organization to reveal an original perspective on the Dutch landscape (views which could in fact be interpreted in some etchings as moonscape rather than local terrain), and as such he can be favorably compared to the pioneering Cézanne. R.H. Fuchs attributes Seghers's innovation to the fact that his compositional organization seems indebted to contemporary realism while creating imaginary landscape, whereas many landscapes of the period include at least some identifiable aspects of the Dutch countryside (Fuchs, 122).

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[90] Translated as "Night-time chant of a wandering Asian sheep-herder."
[91] See fig.33 for an example of Seghers's landscapes with a solitary figure.

While Fuchs identifies Seghers's innovation in composition, Catherine Levesque offers that what made Seghers an exceptional artist is his evocative use of colour and "meticulously worked line," combining "highly refined technique" with the "exploitation of accident and trial and chance" (58). This combination of technique emphasizes the materiality and transformation of nature in a way unsurpassed by other artists of the time: "in his highly textured prints of ruins, for example, the emphasis on the subject's mutability and transcience is echoed in the means of making"(*Ibid*, 59).[92] Here, as Beckett identified in Joyce's *Work in Progress*, " form is content, content is form" (*Disjecta*, 27).

Beckett would have appreciated both Seghers's "clear logic of organization," coupled with a creative ordering of motifs that did not sentimentalize. As such, Seghers's textured terrain could be considered as a borderland to the admirable "architectonics" Beckett identified in Cézanne's *Montagne Sainte-Hilaire* (1905-06)[93] (fig. 34) at the Tate, and as a precursor to a more geometric *tableau vivant* by Friedrich, such as *Sea of Ice* (fig. 2). As Nixon suggests: "Dismissive of the sentimental expression of anthropomorphism, yet unable to achieve the cold "architectonics" of Cézanne, Beckett ultimately sought a middle ground that the innovative yet emotive Seghers could supply" (Nixon 2011, 159).

[92] The "ruin" offers another interesting metaphor for what Beckett sought in language when he spoke of the "materiality of the word surface" in the Kaun letter. Rather than a veil that must be lifted to get at the nothingness behind, here the word surface is weathered like a stone wall to reveal the nothingness within.
[93] Cézanne painted the Montagne Sainte-Hilaire located near his native Aix-en-Provence some sixty times, as a continued exercise in the handling of space. In an attempt to create a sense of depth, Cézanne ignored the laws of classical perspective, and focused on surface and structure, encouraging each object to be independent within the space of the picture. As such the "relationship of one object to another takes precedence over traditional single-point perspective"(Voorhies, Web). See fig.35 for Seghers's *Mountainous Landscape*, a painting that carries a similar sentiment to Cézanne's *Montagne Saint-Victoire*.

Duly impressed by the incommensurability of subject and landscape in Cézanne, Beckett took a considerable interest in the French post-impressionist during the mid-1930s, as evidenced by a letter written to MacGreevy 14 August 1937, in continuation of the topic:

> What I feel he gets so well, dispassionately, not tragically like Watteau, is the heterogeneity of nature & the human denizens, the unalterable alienness of the 2 phenomena, the 2 solitudes, or the solitude and the loneliness, the loneliness in the solitude that cannot quicken to loneliness & the loneliness that cannot lapse into solitude. There is nothing of the kind in Constable, the landscape shelters or threatens or serves or destroys, his nature is really infected with 'spirit,'ultimately as humanised & romantic as Turner's was & Claude's was not & Cézanne's was not. (SB to TM, 14 August 1937)[94]

This passage, which hints at Beckett's quietist attitude, could easily apply to a number of Seghers's landscape in which a singular figure diminished in haunting grandeur serves to amplify the vastness of space with atmospheric solitude. Figures in Seghers's painting do not work against the environment (as in Constable), nor are they in communion with it (as in typical Dutch landscapes of the period); here man becomes absorbed into the texture and pattern of his environment – a kind of dissolution which hints at the incommensurability Beckett will identify in Cézanne.

Given that Cézanne is on his mind at this time, it is likely that this artist is used as comparison in Seghers's measurement of success when Beckett views the latter's prints in the Zwinger Gallery in Dresden that same year (1937). Identifying a treatment of landscape that is quite apart from those of his Dutch contemporaries, Beckett calls Seghers a "[v]ery modern talent" (Qtd. in Nixon 2011, 159). For Beckett, Seghers's modern approach is based on the fact that "he is both less 'stylized' and less 'sentimental' than his contemporaries" (Nixon 2007, 64). Indeed Seghers resists "the itch to animize"

[94] *Letters Vol.1*, 540.

and even the most untrained eye could identify Seghers's terrain, more geologic than botanical, as almost "unapproachably alien," the terms which Beckett used to describe the landscape by Cézanne.[95]

Hercules Seghers and Rembrandt (dismissed for his proficiency by Beckett)[96] were considered two major exceptions to the tradition of tonal realism, and both would have decisive influence on landscape painting during the 1650s. Very little is known about Seghers and only a dozen or so paintings can be attributed to him, while only 183 impressions of his prints are known worldwide, taken from 54 copper plates (Van Camp, 2). He was born in Haarlem in 1589 or 1590 and died circa 1638 in The Hague. In between 1592 and 1596, his family moved to Amsterdam where Seghers apprenticed under Gillis van Coninxloo, a Flemish émigré painter of imaginary wooded landscapes (*Ibid*). It is believed that Seghers began as a painter but a lack of documentary evidence makes his debut as a printmaker unclear (Stechow, 36). He entered the guild of Haarlem in 1612, along with Esaias van de Velde and Willem Buytewech, and the coincidence suggests that he may have become interested in printmaking at this time. It is in fact Van de Velde whom E. Haverkamp Begemann, a specialist in Dutch and Netherlandish art, credits for the creation of a "new type of landscape art" in developing "a trend of

[95] Letter to Thomas MacGreevy, 8 September 1934.

[96] Nixon points out that "the only Rembrandt noted with unqualified praise ('magnificent') is, tellingly, the Dresden *Self-Portrait with a Sketchbook* (1657) (fig.36), which shows the aged painter with a heavy pensive look. Beckett's comment, that 'all light on hand,' reinforces the painting's implication of the artist who suffers within the creative act (GD, 10 February 1937)" (Nixon, 2011, 154). The authenticity of the Dresden version is now "unanimously rejected" based on discrepancies of colour scheme, brushwork, signature, and facial physiognomy compared to that of "Rembrandt's autograph work of the 1650s" (Van Der Wetering). Rembrandt did initially suffer financially due to the fact that he did not cater to the wishes of the clientele (and in fact, etches a self-portrait in beggars clothing illustrating the artist's toll of not accommodating market taste). Beckett's ambivalence towards Rembrandt must be based more on the artist's mastery than his biographical background, in that he appeared to value creativity at the expense of profit and was difficult to deal with, making him an exemplar of the suffering artist. For an interesting discussion on Rembrandt's statement on the poverty of the artist, see Dickney, Stephanie S. "Begging for Attention: The Artful Context of Rembrandt's Etching 'Beggar Seated on a Bank'". *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*.Vol 5:2. Summer 2013.

peaceful, quiet views of farms and rivers," while " Seghers, on the other hand, intensified the traditional imaginary mountain landscape and transformed it to such an extent that its origins was not recognizable any more" (Begemann 6).

At the age of seventeen Seghers bought a painting depicting a mountainous landscape at the sale of Coninxloo's estate, illustrating an early fascination for a topic that he would repeatedly treat in his paintings and prints. Other inspiration for rocky terrain may have been gained through the work of Joos de Momper, to whom he was likely introduced by Coninxloo (Begemann, 6). Beyond Coninxloo and de Momper, An van Camp[97] cites that possible inspirations for the iconography in Seghers's art can be found in earlier Flemish and Dutch landscape artists such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Lucas van Valckenborch and Hendrick Goltzius, who was famous for his chiaroscuro woodcuts (Van Camp, 4). Begemann adds that Seghers's representation of trees and hills is indebted to Elsheimer and mentions the early sixteenth-century German artists Altdorfer and Baldung Grien as other possible influences. Under these influences, Seghers depicted a grander and more menacing version of nature, doing so with "a Dutch sensitivity to changing light and atmospheric detail" (Fuchs, 123). His etched landscapes ranged between two extremes:

> ...on the one hand the fantastic, imaginary views of deserted valleys surrounded by wild rock formations, on the other side the naturalistic views of fields with distant villages. The printed landscapes of the first group predominate in numbers while there are only two properly speaking panoramic views of Dutch villages of which in total five impressions exist. (Begemann 9) [98]

[97] An van Camp is a specialist in Dutch and Flemish Art at the British Museum.
[98] On 2 January 1937, Beckett comments in his diary on "Two Hercules Seghers...both flat landscapes with view of Rhenen, one formerly given to Van Goyen, but the tone is already much more piercing, & less stylised than V.G.'s" (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 159). See fig. 37 for *View of Rhenen*.

The scant archival documents on Seghers testify to his financial situation, which was usually grim due to the fact that his work went unappreciated until after his death -- such details of destitution would not be lost on Beckett.[99] Van Camp largely bases her assessment of Seghers's financial situation on what Begemann classifies a "highly anecdotal" biography by Samuel van Hoogstraten in the 1678 *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst* (*Introduction to the Academy of Painting*), a source that Begemann treats with caution. Hoogstraten describes Seghers as an artist "born under Saturn," much in the shadow of misfortune as was Elsheimer as depicted by Sandrart.[100] Hoogstraten, who Begemann says uses Seghers as a moral exemplar of a victim of unfortunate circumstance, suggests that Seghers died after falling down stairs after drowning his sorrows in wine over his failure. This treatment, argues Begemann, is in line with "a well known pattern of the artist endowed with genius and cursed by melancholy" (8).

Whether Seghers was impoverished or not is of little importance to the present study, and one can be certain that the version of Seghers's biography that treated him as an "authentically tragic figure" would be the one most appealing to Beckett, and indeed appears to be the dominant version in circulation. However, what is of note is Begemann's position that Hoogstraten's assumption of failure is based on Seghers's relatively low production, similar to Rubens's judgment of Elsheimer's waste of genius

[99] In "Beckett and Romanticism in the 1930s," Mark Nixon describes Seghers as "by all accounts a drunken, destitute, unappreciated artist"(63). While I could verify the latter two qualities, I could not find evidence of his drinking habits. The opinion that Seghers was unappreciated in his lifetime seems based on accounts by Samuel van Hoogstraten. Begemann challenges this opinion stating that his fellow artists did appreciate Seghers, as evidenced from inventories of their belongings: "Rembrandt, for example, owned in 1656 no less than eight paintings [by Seghers]. During his lifetime two of Seghers's paintings found their way into the collection of the House of Orange in the Hague in or before (1632) and one was offered for sale to the King of Denmark as early as 1621" (Begemann 7).

[100] Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) was a German Baroque art historian and painter, active in Amersterdam during the Dutch Golden Age.

by “laziness,” opinions not so foreign to the contemporary measure of success, which balances on productivity. Begemann argues that the credibility in Seghers’s biography is unjustly based on the reasoning that since Hoogstraten offers good first-hand knowledge of Seghers’s prints, such as the fact that he “printed” painting on textile, that he cut and reused some copper plates, and “pulled very few impressions” (all of which can be corroborated by his surviving prints) (Van Camp, 3), that his interpretation of Seghers’s failure as a printmaker “was primarily based on his knowledge of the prints rather than of the factual circumstances” (Begemann 9):

> Not understanding fully the very nature of these prints of which each single one was an experiment, he misinterpreted the small number of impressions pulled and applied the apparent lack of success to all his work. Whether Seghers actually was poor is not known. The references to his debts in contemporary documents should not necessarily give the impression of poverty, since borrowing money then was as usual as it is nowadays and because the majority of documents about seventeenth century artists concern debts and borrowings (without these we would know as little about these artists as about the painters of the fifteenth century). That Seghers dealt in works of art is not a sign of poverty either: dealing was not unusual as a side occupation for artists in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. (*Ibid*)

Contrary to printmakers of the time, an examination of existing work suggests that Seghers was more concerned with originality than production (a risky proposition in terms of profit- making), hence he is said to have “printed painting.” David Freedberg believes the term apt in describing Seghers’s rare prints: “In the first place, they are in colour, with only a few exceptions; secondly, they are individualized, and not simply graphic representations of one another. In other words, Seghers used the processes of printmaking not for reproductive but for individuating purposes” (45). (According to Freedberg (45), Seghers was a highly skilled and innovative printmaker considered unsurpassed even by Rembrandt.) His greatest invention, according to An van Camp,

"was a process of ground-lift etching (also known as sugar-lift or sugar-bite etching, sugar aquatint or pen method)" (4), which resulted in the lines of the print having a granulated finish.

Notably Seghers did not attempt to correct errors off the plates that occurred during printing, and this evidence of his "failing better" becomes an interesting aspect of the final work. As An van Camp confirms, Seghers's experiments with different etching grounds and acid biting often caused damage to the copper: "Many prints show traces of these accidents and Seghers must have consciously printed from faulty plates, perhaps in order to use these imperfections to his advantage while creating original conditions" (4) (fig. 38). While most other artists would view these imperfections as a sign of failure and discard the plate or attempt a correction, Seghers used them as marks of distinction.

Certainly Seghers's "marks of failure," which signified his preference for the creative process over market taste would endear Beckett to this "marginalized" Dutch artist, in his aforementioned preference for artistic ignorance over mastery. This interpretation is somewhat misleading as Seghers was an exceptionally skilled artist, but his exploitation of chance and treatment of subject matter may have cummulatively contributed to Beckett's postwar approach to his own work, which would put emphasis on "poverty, failure, exile and loss" (Knowlson 1996, 353). This post-revelation (1946) perspective on writing, was already formulating for Beckett during the German trip as Nixon notes, "from 1936 onward, a growing emphasis on irrationality and incompetence contributed to a shift in Beckett's aesthetic thinking, as he began to seek a way to express his emotions without concession or loss of substance" (Nixon 2011, 2). Moreover, the seriality and experimentation associated with the "printed paintings" of Seghers could be

likened to, in the words of Gontarksi, the "rarified world of Beckett's late short fiction," with the short tales from "All Strange Away" to *Stirrings Still*, being fundamentally slightly altered versions of each other and almost indistinguishable from the late novels (Gontarski 1995, xxx). "Taken together," continues Gontarksi, "Beckett's short prose pieces not only outline his development as an artist, but suggest as well Beckett's own view of his art, that it is all part of a continuous process, a series" (*Ibid*).

Similar to Beckett, Seghers is known to have given repeated treatment to subject matter in states of decomposition, and for example, printed many versions of the Abbey of Rijnsburg (as did many other artists of the period).[101] However, explains Levesque, for the most part in the serial prints of similar subject matter by artists such as Visscher, Buytewech, and Van de Velde "native landscapes dominate and provide an unfolding context for looking" (59). Levesque continues:

> In contrast, Seghers's various versions of Rijnsburg Abbey immerse the viewer in the means by which the very subject alters. His treatment of the ruins conveys time and transformation both in the processes of art that transform the physical structure of the ruin (processes that parallel those of nature) and also in the way that the different versions condition the viewer's optical experience. Though the interrelation of art, nature, time, and memory are shared in all the prints of ruins considered here, Seghers's work is extraordinary in its self-consciousness and in its intensity of vision. (59)

As Levesque says of Seghers, so too could we say that Beckett's slightly altered versions of similar subject matter condition the readers' (and viewers') "optical" experience, while establishing a consistent *bémolisé* aesthetic. And as with Elsheimer, whose work (or lack thereof) created a mythology around him, Seghers's desolate scenes formed a dark lens through which he was popularly viewed. As Begemann explains:

[101] Cézanne and Friedrich were other artists who dedicated much of their careers to the treatment of repeated subject matter. All three are joined in their sustained interest in depicting mountains. See fig. 39 for *The Ruins of the Abbey of Rijnsburg.*

> His hostile, barren valleys and mountains were so hauntingly inhuman that they created legends about his personality, and so thoroughly personal that he had no followers and little influence. Simultaneously with the imaginary mountain landscapes, at least during part of his incompletely established career, he made etchings of existing buildings such as the Abbey at Rijnsburg near Leiden, and of trees and woods he saw, and he etched and painted a few panoramic views of villages and of the town of Rhenen on the Rhine which seem a withdrawal from the visionary vistas of valleys of doom. (10)

This creation of persona based on *oeuvre* is similar to the tendency, as explained by Sean Kennedy, to view Beckett as "a profoundly ahistorical writer, [who] all too often is read as an artist from nowhere, one whose imagination functioned outside of history" (Kennedy, 21). Much like Seghers and Elsheimer, one conception of Beckett's identity is popularly formed around aesthetics rather than history – for many, his stories herald from the nebulous territory of modernism and not Ireland. However, the letters reveal that much of Beckett's writing is based less on the conceptual and more on the personal, cloaked in a veil of varying thickness. Moreover, the uncertain (or *unnamable*) details of biography become traits of the Beckett canon; such as the continuous play on identity, in *Endgame* or *Waiting for Godot* -- dramas based on mutable histories and characters who may or may not exist, in landscapes more or less geographically defined:

> In Godot it is a sky that is sky only in name, a tree that makes them wonder whether it is one, tiny and shriveled. I should like to see it set up any old how, sordidly abstract as, nature is, for the Estragons and Vladimirs, a place of suffering, sweaty and fishy, where sometimes a turnip grows or a ditch opens up. (*Letters Vol. 2*, p.218)

Indeed, Seghers's rocky scenes seem to be that place where a "ditch opens up," creating an obstacle in the otherwise enjoyable walking scenes that abound in the Dutch seventeenth-century. Contrary to the majority of seventeenth-century landscape prints

and paintings intended as a pictorial Sunday stroll in the countryside, Seghers's "wild and desolate visions" presented less agreeable views (Freedberg, 47). In Seghers's "visions" there is a hint of the Romantic sublime as vastness seems to challenge the confines of the composition anchored by a tiny figure, too minute for the task, or by a tree stump whose roots no longer run deep -- small, uncertain forms that emphasize the expanse. These hostile territories are similar to the many found in Beckett's later works, "in which the artist figure, "neither wholly self nor wholly other" inhabit a no-man's-land, "an unspeakable […] home"(Gontarski 1995, xxvi).

Here Gontarski uses the short text, "The Cliff" to demonstrate this environmental alienation, as the narrative "you" viewing the cliff through a window is at once joined to and separated from the precipice by the glass. To take this analogy one step further, the act of viewing a landscape through a window is a similar to that of viewing a landscape tableau in a frame, where the viewer is at once brought closer to nature by its mimicry but separated by its fallacy.

Seghers uses motifs similar to those of the sublime landscapes of the Romantics, but the granulated and washed effect mutes the scene as though it has been covered by a diaphanous veil. This "filter" results in a minor key romantic mood which Beckett identifies in Friedrich and one which Elsheimer had previously achieved in his paintings through lighting and a subdued treatment of narrative. Indeed, as illustrated by an abbreviated *catalogue raisonée* by Begemann, we see a landscape in between Elsheimer and Friedrich and reminiscent of Dante's *Purgatorio* -- a topography that never completely leaves the mind of Beckett.[102] Begemann describes *Rocky River Landscape with a Road* as a "hauntingly inhuman landscape," more reminiscent of a lunar

[102] Beckett reads re-reads Dante late in life, near the time of his death.

landscape than any other print of the seventeenth century*:* "The shadows are menacing, the crevices in the rocks seem pitfalls for any man who would dare to enter these deserts of rock and stone." While *Mountain Landscape with Rigging of a Ship,* depicts:

> ...a road with wheel tracks [which] winds itself over cliffs to a windmill precariously perched on a hill farther down. Beyond the mill, deep down between the mountains in shadows which seem eternal, lies a village with a church. The desolateness of the scene is intensified by the tree stumps in the foreground and the minute traveler who emerges from behind the foreground hill. The same elements, stumps of broken trees, a road, a lonely village, and rock formations are found in other etchings, such as the *Landscape with a Man Carrying a Stick or the Landscape with a Waterfall.* (Begemann 11)

In Seghers's work we find the same mineralistic quality that Beckett identified in Cézanne (and in later figures painted by J.B. Yeats) and that same sense of a landscape indifferent to man, which would henceforth underline Beckett's aesthetic (Ackerley and Gontarski, 270). It is the kind of brittle and spectral landscape associated with the hallucinatory terrains journeyed by a solitary figure in such tales as "Ill Seen Ill Said," "The Calmative" or the "Fizzles," for example.

This un-pastoral approach to landscape, coupled with reduced staffage, placed Seghers outside of the norm (and on the verge of Romanticism), as human figures in Dutch landscape paintings or prints were intended to show man's domination over, or harmony with, nature. In the nineteenth century, Caspar David Friedrich will develop this motif of the solitary figure in an increasingly sublime landscape whose limits rest somewhere beyond imagination.

CHAPTER 4

Walking Towards Friedrich

Close your bodily eye so that you may see your picture first with the spiritual eye. Then bring to the light of day that which you have seen in the darkness so that it may react upon others from the outside inwards.

Caspar David Friedrich[103]

In the Dutch compositions, certain motifs such as roadways and qualities of formal structure, were applied in order to create a deeper or more reflective engagement between the viewer and the landscape. Art historian Lawrence O. Goedde explains:

> Among the most notable of these themes and devices is the prominence of roads, paths, rivers, and streams, populated by travelers on foot, or in carriages and wagons, or in boats and ferries, or on horseback. Some travelers rest by the road, and carriages stop at country inns, but the implication of a continuing journey is clear (Goedde 134).

Friedrich also employed a formalized canvas with similar motifs of travel, although in his works the journey was often a solitary one in an isolated landscape. When Friedrich depicted resting figures, as he often did, the pause reads more as the final stop rather than a restorative rest. In many Dutch paintings, there is a geometric dynamism that occurs in the placement of the multiple figures within the landscape that suggests a continuance -- a "going-on" which draws our attention to action from the foreground to the background (which is a technique Beckett also applies in his fiction, even if his characters seem reluctant to proceed). However, in Friedrich's relatively empty canvases, it is the landscape itself which appears to possess some latent and menacing dynamism, suggesting that it is the void that will ultimately consume the figure. Furthermore, the resting figures in Friedrich's landscape, often are injured as we find crutches litter the

[103] Friedrich's advice to the artist found in Vaughn, 68.

edges of a previously trodden path leading up to a remotely stationed symbol of divinity.[104] Interestingly, through Friedrich's compositional technique these indices of walking aids strewn along a path, usually drawn on the diagonal, create more of an antecedent narrative. Unlike the "commercial" Dutch paintings, which encourage a feeling of optimism and progress through the enterprising (yet harmonious) domination of man over nature, in Friedrich we don't imagine a "going on" but can imagine prior suffering before a final "staying still." Here we sense a seeking and an arrival, but we cannot be sure that salvation has been found (in fact, we are fairly certain is hasn't).

All of these details -- the "limping" narrative, the crutches, the stillness, the stopping, have resonance throughout the Beckett canon, which is littered with characters who often have their mobility partially or entirely compromised. Likely Beckett's most famous walker is Watt, whose broken gait trumps his spirit of adventure and therefore "preferred having his back to his destination" (26):

> Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far possible towards the north, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination and could sit down.(30)

Where Beckett's limping (or otherwise fleet-footed) walkers differ from those of Friedrich is that Friedrich's figures are on a Romantic quest -- their progress and perseverance is motivated by a seeking of knowledge, whereas in Beckett walking is more mechanical and less botanizing. Beckett's walkers move in a routine of gesture,

[104] See fig. 40 *Winter Landscape with Church*, and the particularly Beckettian *Graveyard under Snow* (fig.19).

reflecting Kant's definition of art in the *Critique of Judgment* as "purposiveness without purpose" (Kant, 69). Movement for Belacqua in "Ding-Dong" is intuitive and constant: "The mere act of rising and going irrespective of whence and where, did him good" (*MPTK*, 31); while the narrator "From an Abandoned Work" confesses, "I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way" (*The Complete Short Prose*, 156). However, in Friedrich a Romantic seeking is constantly emphasized in the depiction of movement (which seems slow-going), particularly in the prospecting stance of the *Rückenfigur*.

What Friedrich seems to offer in his resting narratives is a visual metaphor of the "Beethoven pause" referred to in "Ding-Dong," in which the arrested state of both subject and object in a kind of never-ending frozen tableau vivant becomes the "unfathomable abysses of silence" in Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, linked not by materiality so much, but by intermittent movement. For Beckett, Friedrich's art seems to offer visual representation of silence and stillness, qualities to which Beckett's works aspire and painting always gratifies.

FRIEDRICH and "...this business of the moon" [105]

No one. I saw on the horizon, where sky, sea, plain and mountain meet, a few low stars, not to be confused with the fires men light, at night, or that go alight alone.

("The Calmative")[106]

On 14 February 1937, after viewing *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, Beckett pens the now well-known lines, which perhaps mark the moment when Friedrich permanently enters his developing aesthetic repertoire: "Pleasant predilection for 2 tiny

[105] *Watt*, 36.
[106] *The Complete Short Prose*, 69.

languid men in his landscapes, as in the little moon landscape, that is the only kind of romantic still tolerable, the bémolisé [the minor key]" (qtd. in Nixon, 2011, 142). Reflecting on the creative progression of the devoutly Protestant painter, it would appear that Friedrich too developed a minor key sensibility. In 1790, Friedrich entered into his initial formal art training with Johann Gottfried Quistorp, an instructor at the University of Greifswald (a low ranking institution among European standards) (Koerner, 92). Quistorp was aligned with the Sturm and Drang movement, therefore he valued originality over imitation and opposed artists who "'slavishly imitated the art of their predecessors, or adhered blindly to the prattle about rules" (*Ibid*).[107] Despite this approach to theory, Quistorp had the young students begin their training by copying from old masters in order to acquire "the mechanical aspect of art" (*Ibid*). It is through this initial training that Friedrich would have been exposed to the works of Adam Elsheimer, among others, as Quistorp possessed an "extensive collection of some fifty paintings and 1400 drawings, including works by Hans Holbein the Elder, Palma Vecchio, Jan Gossaert, Anthony van Dyck, Adriaen van Ostade, David Teniers, Charles Lebrun, and Jakob Philipp Hackert" (*Ibid* 92).

Early pictures by Friedrich (now lost) depict violent storms with dramatic effects -- a form of drama he gave up in later works. Art historian, William Vaughn traces this early tendency for heightened drama to two of Friedrich's early-career influences -- the poet Ludwig Theobul Kosegarten (like Friedrich, a pronounced melancholic) and the history painter Nicolai Abraham Abilgaard (1743-1809), who was the dominating figure at the Copenhagen Academy during Friedrich's residence there. Both Kosegarten and

[107] This attitude also aligns him somewhat with the thinking of Georges Duthuit, who challenged the importance of classical composition. See *Letters Vol.2*, 88.

Abilgaard were interested in Ossian myth (a theme that regains popularity among the Romantically inclined Irish Revivalists). Abilgaard and peers were also inspired by the Sturm and Drang movement, which aimed to bring a new level of dramatic intensity to creative work. However, the most significant and overriding influence was effected by the landscape painting Friedrich encountered while at the Academy, most notably by the work of Jens Juel.

Juel (1745-1802) was considered the premier portrait artist in Denmark at the time and the Academy's most skilled and original landscapist. His work is influenced by Aert van der Neer and is "distinguished by its dramatic representation of light, its interest in recognizably 'Northern' scenes, and its relative naturalism which, unlike the more mannered and pathos-charged Sentimentalism of Copenhagaen's other landscapists, discovers its vehicles of 'feeling' in the real landscapes of Denmark" (Koerner 100). Juels showed Friedrich, in a work such as *Northern Lights* that one could evoke the sublime in local rather than necessarily exotic landscapes, and express pathos and sentiment without histrionics. In short, as Koerner describes, Juel shows Friedrich that subject matter abounds and "that infinities everywhere present, must be invoked subjectively, not as attributes of setting or event, but as simply the transformation, through painting, of *how* we see" (Koerner 101).

After time spent in Copenhagen, Friedrich moved to Dresden in 1798, where he would remain for the rest of his life, with intermittent trips to the sea. He was known as a solitary, melancholic individual, who became increasingly isolated in his later years. The move to Dresden was important for him in that it gave him first-hand experience with previously unknown mountain terrain. Here he came under the influence of a Swiss

painter named Adrian Zingg and began basing his pictures on a remote and relatively undeveloped region in an area dubbed "Saxon Switzerland." Like Zingg, Friedrich included the wayside crosses that peppered the landscape, which could be viewed as his preliminary attempts to insert divinity into nature.[108] The fact that Friedrich's work imitated others of the period shows that the subject matter was not unusual, rather what made Friedrich outstanding was his "mastery of light and the way he structured his compositions" (Vaughn 44). Unlike most artists of the time, Friedrich's later landscape compositions begin to dissolve the conventional structure of foreground, mid-ground and background, and increasingly shifted the focus towards a subjective experience. However, what truly marks Friedrich as a revolutionary artist in the course of art history and one demonstrating a modern approach to landscape was the manner in which he "emptied" his canvases, to such an extent that his painting became difficult to classify as genre or landscape. A similar statement could be offered towards Beckett's many postwar narratives in which a figure seated or standing in front of a window sees itself seeing, so that the borders of the window provide a frame for both a self-portrait and a landscape (or a self-portrait in a landscape).

Like Beckett, in the progress of his creative career Friedrich moved towards "nothingness" (*le néant)*, which had a paradoxical effect of enlarging a space to sublime dimensions. Probably the most stunning of his empty canvases, and one noted in the course of art history for this reason is *Monk by the Sea*. Robert Rosenblum describes this painting as

> ...devoid of everything but the lonely confrontation a single figure, a Capuchin monk, with the hypnotic simplicity of a completely unbroken horizon

[108] See fig. 41 for an example of Zingg's work.

line, and above it a no less primal and potentially infinite extension of a gloomy, hazy sky. (Rosenblum 13)

Rosenblum goes on to explain how daring this emptiness was in that x-rays have since revealed that Friedrich had originally painted several boats on the sea, one extending beyond the horizon but then removed them "in what must have been an act of artistic courage and personal compulsion, leaving the monk on the brink of an abyss unprecedented in the history of painting" (13). Here Friedrich boldly plays with erasure in visual space as Beckett would increasingly do in textual space and aesthetic theatrical space. In Beckett's work, an aesthetic of the moody sublime associated with *Monk by the Sea*[109] can be detected, for example, in "The Calmative." Written in first person, it is easy to imagine the following lines as describing some inner monologue by a solitary *Rückenfigur* looking out into Friedrich's calm dark sea:

> And I gazed out to sea, out beyond the breakwaters, without sighting the least vessel. I could see light flush with the water. And the pretty beacons at the harbour mouth I could see too, and others in the distance, flashing from the coast, the islands, the headlands. But seeing still no sign or stir I made ready to go, to turn away sadly from this dead haven, for there are scenes that call for strange farewells. I had merely to bow my head and look down at my feet, for it is in this attitude I always drew the strength to, how shall I say, I don't know, and it was always from the earth, rather than from the sky, not withstanding its reputation, that my help came in time of trouble (*The Complete Short Prose*, 65).[110]

In "The Calmative," the narrator (or his ghostly form) meets with various encounters as he journeys from his refuge on the edge of the city into the city and to the sea, frequently searching the sky for "the Bears" as a means of wayfinding. The gaze of the dislocated "I" recalls that of Friedrich's characteristic *Rückenfigur*, searching for points of reference

[109] See fig. 8.
[110] This sublime vista is similar to one described by the "I" in "The End": "I lay in the cave and sometimes looked out at the horizon. I saw above me a vast trembling expanse without islands or promontories" (*The Complete Short Prose*, 89).

in the night-time celestial abyss or nautical void, until finally he is "back in the same blinding void as before" (*Complete Short Prose,* 76).

As in Friedrich, figures on the edge of the abyss are a frequent motif in Beckett and the stance most representative of this inward/outward gaze is held by the *Rückenfigur* -- the solitary back-facing figure, which states at once a sense of relationship with and isolation from the world and "confers upon a landscape an aspect of pastness or belatedness" (Koerner 269). Koerner continues: "With the *Rückenfigur*, the artist announces that what I see is what it already sees and, further, that what it sees is its having been seen by a gaze antecedent to it" (294). Indeed, the *Rückenfigur* is a suitable figure for the first-person narrator in the works of Beckett -- characters who are as much backward facing to the reader as they are backward glancing to the past. Much like the solitary back-facing figure in Friedrich; Beckett's characters are alone to confront the irreconcilable past and the terrifying vista of an unformed future shrouded in dark and obscured by distance. For example, *Krapp's Last Tape* is profoundly romantic in complexion as it comtemplates the substance of temporality and how time has worked against the materials of archival effort:

> [Pause.]
>
> Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that...[hesitates]...for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely [*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*] --great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most –

> [*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*] -- unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire – [*Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*] […]
>
> [Pause.]
>
> Past midnight. Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited.
>
> (*Collected Shorter Play*s, 61-62)

Here we have the *Rückenfigur* poised on the edge of a Turneresque seascape rather than a static sublime, illustrating perhaps that it is the landscape of memory that "threatens or destroys," as Krapp, unable to "harmonize with nature," is denied his "memorable equinox" (Ackerley and Gontarski, 204).[111] And in Dutch fashion, Krapp reflects back on his life, understanding himself as one understands the poignancy of a ruin being a fragment of its former state, but unable to remember the complete whole.

Krapp, like many of Beckett's characters, lives in a pattern of repetition. At sixty-nine, Krapp realizes the futility of his efforts in achieving order, once represented by his catalogued boxes of tapes, which he knocks to the floor. His last attempt at imposing control dissolves into impatience as he abruptly pauses, rewinds, and advances the tape in the recorder, as he recognizes the foolishness of his younger self for abandoning love. The solitude of both the young and old Krapp is further emphasized (as is the *bémolisé* atmosphere) by the repeated reveries, "Past midnight. Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited" (*The Collected Shorter Plays*, 61).

[111] As Knowlson describes, "Krapp's 'vision at last' has been widely regarded as a mirror reflection of Beckett's own revelation" (although Beckett makes it clear that his revelation occurred in his mother's room and not on the pier at Dún Laoghaire). "The wild stormy night and the harbour setting of Krapp's fitional experience to some extent deliberately echo the Romantic mystical experience, with nature matching the excitement of his inner torment, revealing the truth to a man seeking to find his way" (Knowlson 1996, 352).

Indeed “repetition” defines many of Beckett’s characters, caught in compulsive gestures of movement or remembering, but also describes the character *of* Beckett, who dedicated a lifetime to repetitious examination of the human condition (itself defined by repetition). Friedrich dedicated his life to similar pursuits and was therefore criticized for being monotonous in his choice of subject matter, but Koerner argues that he transcends this, and that repetition is the master narrative of his art: “all the synthesizing work that his painting performs in creating nature anew condenses in an emblem not of immediate original experience but of its monstrous double: the eternal return of the same” (Koerner, 294). Hence for Friedrich, as in *Murphy*, the sun also shines on the “nothing new,” if only just.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion: The Minor Key of Incommensurability

A sky an earth an under-earth where I am inconceivable.

(*How It Is*, 37)

No but now, now, simply stay still, standing before a window, one hand on the wall, the other clutching your shirt, and see the sky, a long gaze, but no, gasps and spasms, a childhood sea, other skies, another body.

("Fizzle 6: [Old Earth]")[112]

There is an understanding that two distinct (but not irreconcilable) approaches provide a framework to art in the Netherlands at the beginning of the seventeenth-century: the first based on life and the second on reality (Freedberg, 11). The trend during the period was towards increasing realism from around 1610 onwards -- before that landscapes appeared entirely imaginary; later they give a much more realistic impression, even when close scrutiny reveals them to be carefully composed (*Ibid*). In Dutch artistic theory, the terms used to describe drawing or painting from life is *naer het leven,* while *uyt den gheest* distinguishes art made from the imagination (*Ibid*).[113] The first term can be problematic when taken too literally -- to take from life is not to reproduce the whole of experience but to select elements to give the impression of a realistic entity. Beckett understood this of course, but subverts the illusion of the real even further by evoking the nocturnal so that one must trust or imagine that what was there, visible in the day, remains at night.

[112] *The Complete Short Prose*, 239.
[113] A more direct translation might read: *naer het leven:* near to life*; uyt den gheest:* from the mind.

Responding to a question posed by Lawrence E. Harvey on the sense of *le néant* (nothingness) in his work, Beckett suggested that it was "more [...] a sense of 'restlessness of moving about at night.' Much of this can be found in my work" (qtd. in Knowlson and Knowlson, 136). This kind of "night movement" is described in "Texts for Nothing," where in order to avoid collision with shadowed obstacles one must move in the dark with more measure, yet less confidence, so that the "meaningless" motions of man take on further consciousness – another possible model for Beckett's preference of artistic ignorance over mastery:

> Above is the light, the elements, a kind of light, sufficient to see by, the living find their ways, without too much trouble, avoid one another, unite, avoid the obstacles, without too much trouble, seek with their eyes, close their eyes, halting, without halting, among the elements, living.
> ("Texts for Nothing")[114]

This excerpt highlights the intervals that define living -- motion and pause, unity and division -- human elements that attempt to join with or resist against their environment. It is a model of how Beckett understood landscape and man's relationship to it, both in art and in the living world, as elements in relation to, but isolated from, one another, seeking "a demand commensurate with the offer" ("Texts for Nothing").[115]

The slivered distinctions between "real" and "imagined" have obvious applications to literary and theatrical composition, where setting is created partly from what has been seen (or the actual) and what is desired or necessary (or the created) to support action. Although not exclusive to Beckett's literary experience, the "seen" and the "created" may act as a set of spectacles, with one lens clear and the other dark, through which to 'see" the landscapes of Beckett, whose chiaroscuro scenes were

[114] *The Complete Short Prose* p. 105.
[115] *The Complete Short Prose,* 105.

certainly based partly on the living landscapes of Ireland, as well as pre- and post-war France and Germany, for example; while an extended canon of art history provides a rich and varied imaginative source. Even Beckett's taste for landscape, particularly of the Dutch seventeenth-century, which he appreciated for its evocation of stillness and silence, was likely inspired by similar sentiments he experienced on his many walks in the Irish countryside. And given the similarity of topography between Holland in the seventeenth century, which was described as the "great bog of Europe'"(Jensen-Adams, 36) and that of Ireland, the Dutch landscape makes for a convincing facsimile for "home." Furthermore, the Dutch landscape print or painting, whose purpose was to provide an imaginary stroll for the viewer likely evoked in Beckett many melancholy memories of walks with his father in the Dublin mountains. As after the death of his beloved father, the bereft Becket said, "What am I to do now but follow his trace over the fields and hedges?" […] At night, when I can't sleep, I do the old walks again and stand beside him [Beckett's father] again one Xmas morning in the fields near Glencullen, listening to the chapel bells" (SB to Susan Manning, 21 May 1955).[116]

Indeed Beckett and his father Bill knew many a country road and mountain path in the environs of Dublin, and their intimacy with the landscape provided a means through which Beckett came to know his father. This nostalgic landscape appears throughout the Beckett canon and even when the texts become reduced to near abstraction, there still exists very much the heather and moss of the Irish countryside. In *Godot,* for example, Beckett uses only the most necessary parts for an illusory whole (a country road, a tree, evening) -- elements that are as much Dutch as they are Irish, as

[116] Qtd. in Nixon 2001, 43.

local as they are universal. The tree in the mind of Beckett, was likely a composite of a botany and art history: a hawthorn from Glencree, and an oak by Friedrich,[117] models then interpreted by Giacometti into a form that looks something like a mere branch rather than an entire tree, something that represents absence more than presence. On stage, the tree becomes something that cuts space rather than fills it, a form whose main purpose is to anchor the abyss and intensify the solitude or loneliness found in that vacancy.

It is this same emptiness of space suggested by a limitless horizon or the boundaries of light in the darkness, which is understood through human scale that gives the aspect of sublime to the Romantics, which in *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* is reduced to something more "agreeable," more quiet. This same mood, which is found in the setting of *Godot* says Eoin O'Brien is "'palpable' in certain weathers walking the summits [of the Dublin mountains]" and "though the urge emphatically to locate the drama there might be resisted, a director in search of the ideal setting for *Godot* could not find better than the lonely summit of Glencree, with its occasional threatened tree" (68). In a night scene evocative of Elsheimer, O'Brien describes the mountains as "cloaked in a silent blackness, softened by the light of the moon and stars above, and in the distance, the black of the sky blends with the purple sea from which it would be indistinguishable were it not for the distinctive lights of the city, the beacons and lighthouses, familiar to Beckett, as to his father" (72):

> I saw the beacons, four in all, including a lightship. I knew them well, even as a child I had known them well. It was evening, I was with my father on a height, he held my hand. I would have liked him to draw me close with a gesture of

[117] See fig. 42 for a photograph of a tree found in a rural area outside of Dublin, which bares a striking resemblance to Friedrich's bent oak in *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*. See also fig. 43 for an etching by Esais Van de Velde of a tree similar to the one in Friedrich's painting. Indeed there is no shortage of similar images of trees in the art of the Dutch seventeenth century.

> protective love, but his mind was on other things. He also taught me the names of the mountains. (*The End*, p.63)

When one considers the genesis of each painting Beckett encountered through the years, of drawings based on life and imagination, of etchings based of drawings, of paintings "after" engravings, the space of environment begins to bloat with the weight of time, and Beckett's "country" begins to assume the stature of "universe." Even more interesting is the manner of Beckett's "drawing from" and "rendering of" an expanding storehouse of images, in that he essentially reduces entire traditions almost back to the blank canvas, with a mere underpainting of atmospheric wash "waiting" to receive the detail of refinement and whose tension exists above formlessness.

Even as Beckett's creative momentum increased, in his "frenzy of writing" between 1946 and 1953, there is a constant saturation of the minor key in his work that never approaches crescendo. As such there is a kind of erasure of place and time that occurs, which relates to S.E. Gontarski's theory of Beckett's deliberate "intent of undoing" in his removal of signifiers, which encourages ahistorical readings. In *Godot*, for example, Beckett, as Con Levanthal explains, sought to create, "a cosmic state, a world condition in which all humanity is involved" (qtd. in O'brien, 68). The removal of signifiers required in the creation of said space (which we understand as an empty one), forms a "deracinated aesthetic," comparable to Seghers's neutralized "alien" places that could be at once anywhere and nowhere and therefore take on an air of timelessness.

This paper touches on a small selection of visual art that Beckett viewed in his lifetime, but what becomes clear even in this limited sampling is the fact that each act of viewing was for him a creative act -- a means of solving problems around subject and

object, language and aesthetics, and the handling of space. As Knowlson states, " What he [Beckett] saw happening in twentieth-century art reinforced his own view of the world and encouraged him to search for new ways of finding an appropriate form to accommodate reality in his own work" (Knowlson 1996, 196). Landscape for Beckett became a topographic illustration of the heights and depths and impassable chasms, which make up the human condition. "Being" is "chaotic -- the opposite of ordered form," Beckett explained to Lawrence Harvey (Knowlson and Knowlson, 134), and in order to break form, one must first understand how it is made and the painting tradition provided this knowledge.

Notably, Beckett was most drawn to painters who were pioneers in their own right -- artists with a "new" way of seeing and of handling space. A centre point of understanding came to Beckett in the 1930s in his encounter with Cézanne, which helped him to further understand the Dutch while clarifying his own aesthetic. The fact that Beckett takes such keen interest in Cézanne, the Dutch and Friedrich, speaks to the depth of his knowledge of landscape, as he hits upon a nexus of perspective and treatment that Wolfgang Stechow feels defines the development of the landscape tradition:

> [...] A Dutch landscape is as far removed from one by Caspar David Friedrich as it is from one by Cézanne. In a Friedrich landscape, man is indissolubly linked to an elevated state of nature which is the reflection of the artist's state of mind; in a Cézanne landscape, man, if at all present, means little or nothing. Dutch landscape painting represents a phase which lies before, or in any case outside, the 'sin' or 'tragedy' of making nature into either the superior or the handmaiden of man; even the conscious wish to 'réaliser le motif' would have been alien to a Dutch artist of that period. Here, nature and man were still completely apart -- and still balanced in perfect harmony. (Stechow 8)

Stechow's summary is very much aligned with Beckett's perspective of the above-mentioned artists and illustrates the manner in which he used one treatment of landscape to understand another. It also marks his ambivalent attitude towards Romanticism demonstrated by his dismissal of and taste for certain artists, the latter group including Caspar David Friedrich, Adam Elsheimer, and Hercules Seghers, all of whom were at one time or another labelled "romantic."[118] As well, Chris Ackerley extends Beckett's romantic exceptions to "the art of Jack B. Yeats [...] the poetry of Hölderlin and Leopardi, and the music of Schubert, each of these artists portraying the insignificance, and the isolation of the human figure in an indifferent world" (79). Ackerley argues that "Beckett rejected 'the impulse towards anthropomorphism,' by evoking Cézanne to define landscape (and hence nature) as ultimately unintelligible, and by making alienation, the very absence of rapport between himself and nature, his working principle" (79). In the letter to MacGreevy of 8 September 1934, he writes:

> [W]hat I feel in Cézanne', he wrote, 'is precisely the absence of a rapport that was all right for Rosa or Ruysdael for whom the animising mode was valid, but would have been fake for him, because he had the sense of his incommensurability not only with life of such a different order as landscape, but even with life of his own order, even with the life...operative in himself. (*Letters Vol.* 222)

Knowlson agrees that Cézanne's approach to landscape painting is "excitingly close to the relationship between man and landscape that Beckett would later examine through his writing" (qtd. in Coulter, 23), although it would be some dozen years before Beckett found his own way of expressing this "incommensurability of man with himself" (Knowlson 1996, 197). I would argue too, that the *bémolisé* was another guiding

[118] Although Beckett admired each of these artists, he certainly would not have had equal adoration for all their works. Based on the yardstick of sentiment and sentimentality, his distaste for certain works would be measured in terms of its leaning towards a full-fledged strain of Romanticism. Each of these artists (but most notably, Friedrich) had examples of these works, where the topography is more anthropomorphized.

principle in the work of Beckett, as when we compare Ackerley's definition of the romantic *isolation* of the human figure in an indifferent world to the *alienation* in Cézanne's incommensurable one, we see that the two principles are not so far divided.

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5. CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH
Man and woman contemplating the moon (c1818/1824)
Oil on canvas
34x44cm
Current location: Alte Nationalgalerie
Object history: 1922 Kunsthandlung Salomon, Dresden; - 1932 Paul Cassirer, Berlin; - Sammlung Lulu Böhler, Luzern; - 1935 Ankauf von der Galerie Fritz Nathan, Luzern

6. A view of the stage set and actors in the 2010 Berkshire Theatre Festival production of *Endgame*.

7. JACOB VAN RUYSDAEL, *The Dam Square in Amsterdam* c.1670

Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

Note the ‘animized’ version of the house, which confronts the viewer much in the same way the windows in the background of the Endgame suggests eyes of skull facing the audience.

8. CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH *Monk by the Sea* (1808- 1809)
Oil on canvas
110 cm x 171.5cm
Alte Nationalgalerie
Berlin

9. ANTONELLA DA MESSINA *St. Sebastian* (1476–9)
Oil on canvas transferred on table, 171 cm × 85 cm
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden

9.1 Detail of *St. Sebastian*

9.2 Detail of *St. Sebastian*

10. CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH *Self-Portrait* (c. 1800), Black chalk, Copenhagen

11. JENS JUEL, *Northern Lights* (circa 1790)
Oil on canvas
31.2 cm x 39.5 cm
Copenhagen

12 . ESAIAS VAN DE VELDE *View of Zierikzee* (1618)
Oil on canvas
27 cm x 40cm
Gemäldegalerie Berlin

13. ESAIAS VAN DE VELDE *Dunes and Hunters* (1629)
Etching

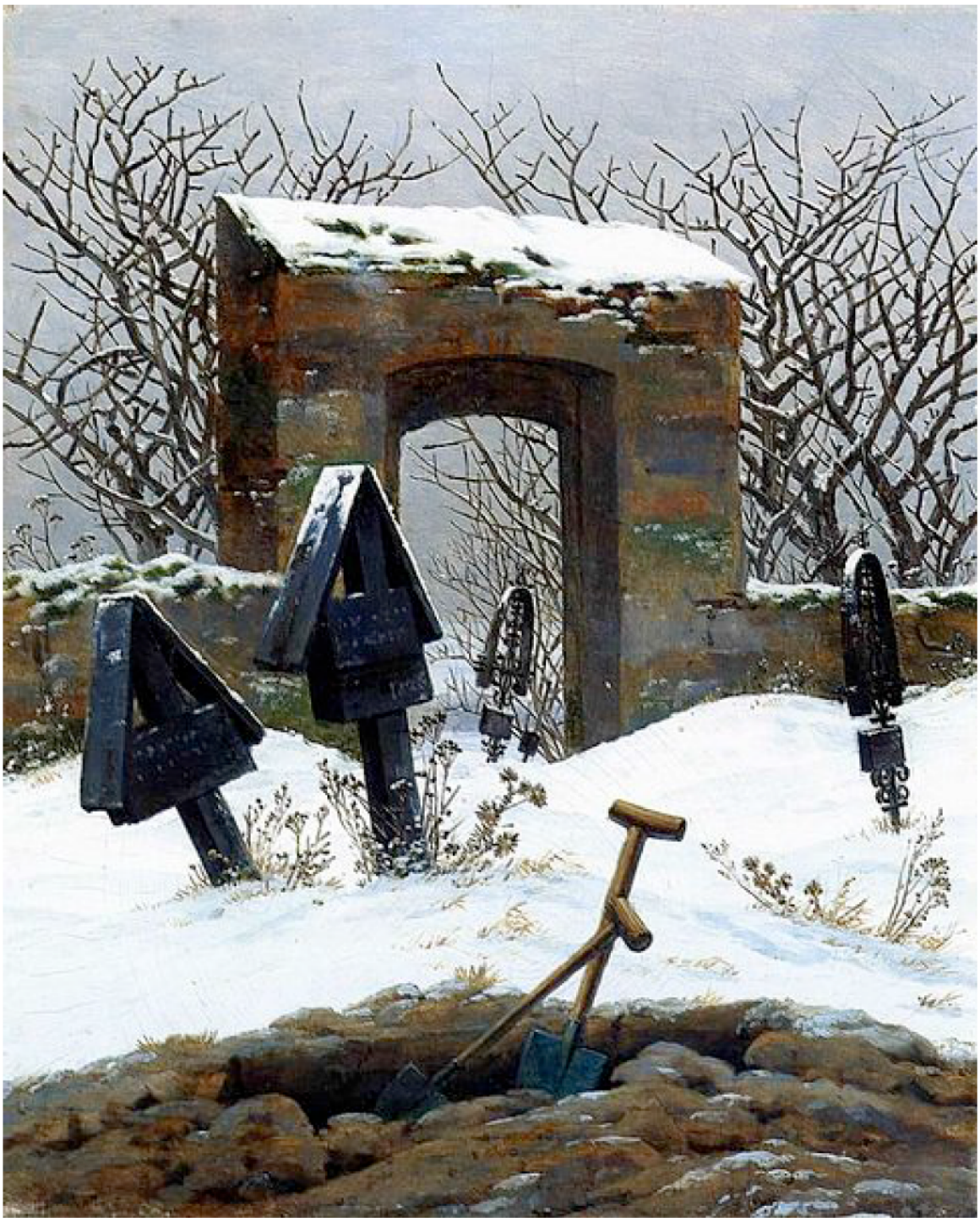
14. CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH *Winter* from the *Stages of Life Series* (c.1834)

15.JACOB VAN RUISDAEL *A Road Leading into a Wood* (c. 1655-60)
Oil on canvas
54.5cm x 71cm
National Gallery London

16.AERT VAN DER NEER *Moonlit landscape with bridge* (1648-1650)
Oil on panel
78.4 x 110.2cm

17.ESAIS VAN VELDE *Spaerwou* (n.d.)
Etching

18.JACOB VAN RUISDAEL *The Large Forest* (c.1655-1660)
Oil on canvas
140cm x 180cm

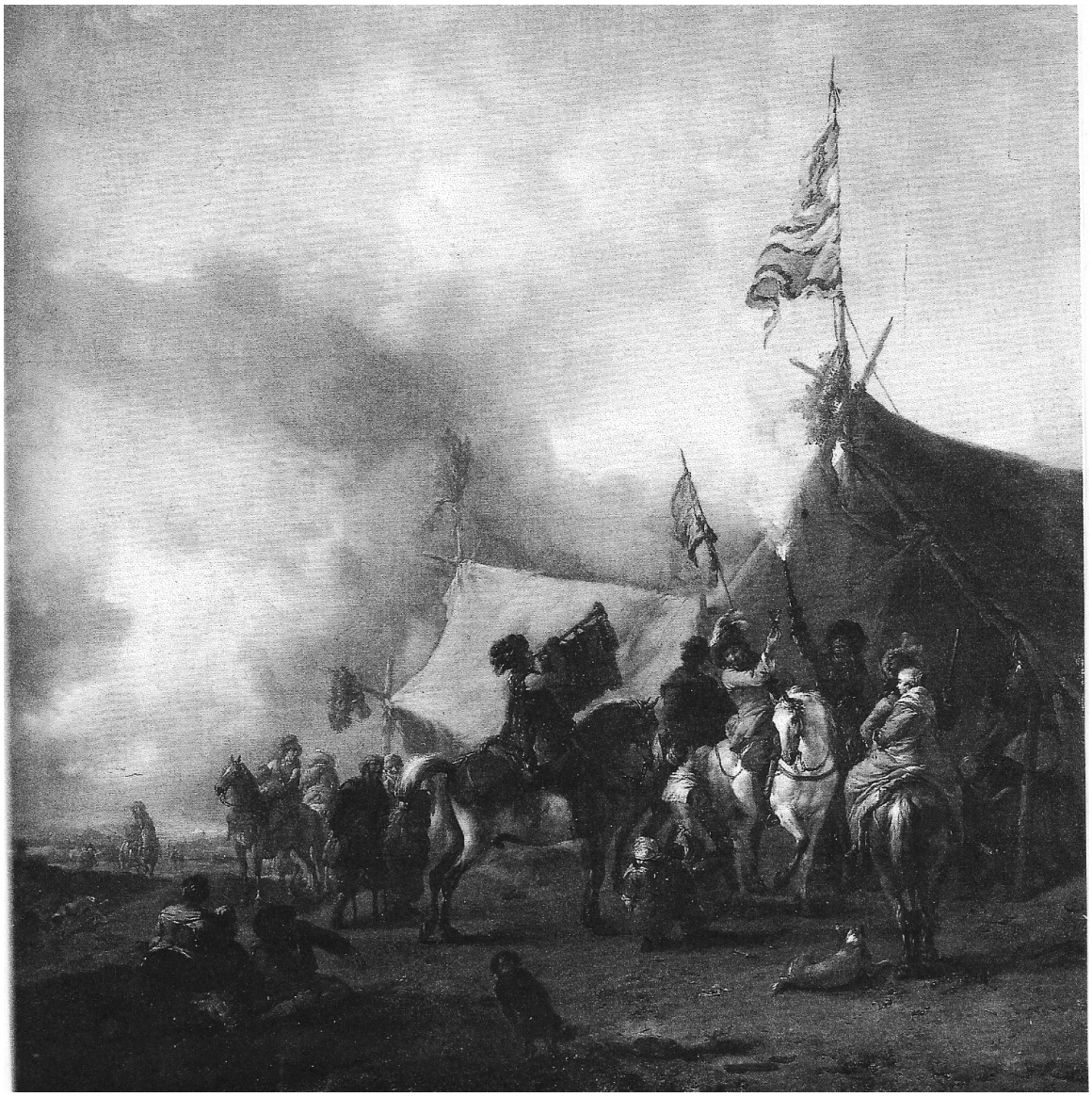


19.CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH *Graveyard under Snow* (1826)
Oil on canvas, 31cm x 25cm
Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig

20. ISAAC VAN OSTADE *Travellers Outside an Inn* (1647)
Oil on panel
Dimensions: 83.2 x109 cm

21. ADRIAEN BROUWER *Smokers in an Inn*
Oil on copper
17.5 x23 cm

22. PHILIPS WOUWERMAN *Path through the Dunes* (second half of seventeenth century)
Oil on oak
35x43cm
Gemäldegalerie Berlin



23.PHILIPS WOUWERMAN *Calvary at Sutler's Booth* (c. 1650-1659)
Oil on panel
49.3 x 44.2cm

24.ADRIAEN BROUWER *Dune Landscape by Moonlight* (c.1636)
Oil on wood
25 x 34 cm
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, Germany

25. ADAM ELSHEIMER *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (c. 1601-1603), Oil on tinned copper, 24 x187 cm, London, Wellington, Apsley House

26. PETER PAUL RUBENS *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (1616)
Oil on canvas
120x111cm
Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig, Germany

27. ADAM ELSHEIMER *Mountain Landscape* (n.d.)
Brunswick Gallery
* *Mountain Landscape* is now entitled *Aurora* (Shaw, 229).

28. ADAM ELSHEIMER *The Flight into Egypt* (1625/30)
Vienna Gallery (n.d)

*This painting is now attributed to Jacob Pynas (Shaw, 2012).

29.ADAM ELSHEIMER *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1609)
Oil on copper
Height: 31 cm. Width 41cm.
Munich

30. REMBRANDT VAN RIJN *The flight into Egypt*: altered from Seghers; Holy Family to r. (c1652) Etching, burin and drypoint; British Museum

31.JOACHIM PATINIR *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* (c. 1524)
Oil on panel
51cm x 96cm

32.PETER PAUL RUBENS *The Flight into Egypt* (1614)
Kassel, Staatliche Kunstammlungen

33.HERCULES SEGHERS (ca. 1598-ca. 1638), *Distant View with Branch of a Pine Tree,* ca. 1630

Comments by An van Camp:

This panoramic landscape, framed on one side by a moss-covered tree growing by a rock face, is enlivened by a diminutive figure walking on a winding path leading into a valley.

The British Museum has three impressions of this landscape, each printed and coloured in a different way.

Each impression seems to evoke a different time of the day. The brown and blue colours here suggest dusk.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/PDF/HerculesSegers_painted-prints-introduction.pdf

34.PAUL CÉZANNE *Montagne Sainte Victoire* (1905-6)
Watercolour on paper
Support: 362x 549mm
Tate, London

35. HERCULES SEGHERS (1589/90 - before 1638)
Mountainous Landscape
Oil on panel
48x64cm

Notice that there is something of a similar sentiment in this Seghers painting and Cézanne's *Montagne Saint-Victoire* (fig. 29). Both are very structured, and the clouds in the Seghers painting, particularly to the viewer's right, have a similar amorphous shape, as does Cézanne's mountain.

36.REMBRANDT VAN RIJN (Counterfeit) *Self-Portrait with Sketchbook* (1655) (Version Four)
Dresden, Staatliche Kuntsammlugen, Gëmaldegalerie, Alte Meister

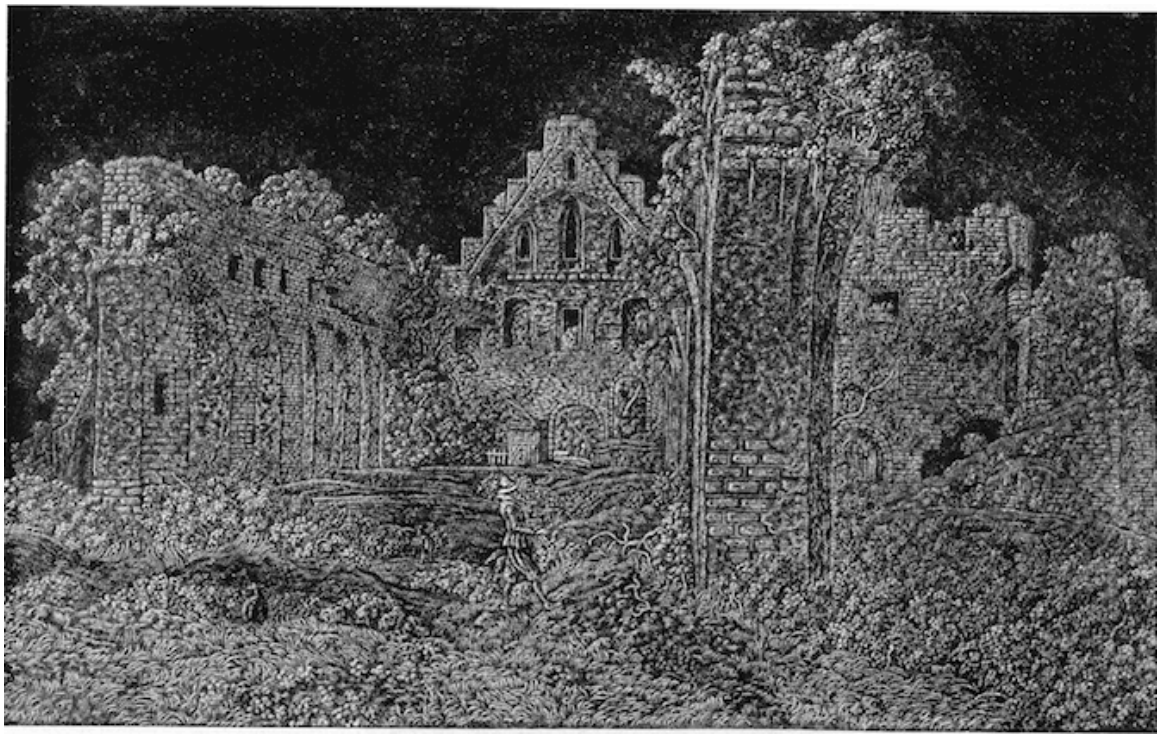
37. HERCULES SEGHERS *View of Rhenen* (1625-1630)
Oil on oak
43x67cm
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Germany

38. HERCULES SEGHERS (c. 1589–c. 1638), *River Valley with Four Trees* (HB 4.I.b)
Etching with surface-tone (285 x 470mm)
S.5534 (from the collection of John Sheepshanks, acquired in 1836)

Comments by An van Camp:

The smudges in the top right corner are the result of acid accidentally spilling on the copper-plate during the biting. Seghers did not correct these imperfections before printing the plate, but instead used them to his advantage in order to create an atmospheric effect. Here they can be interpreted as clouds.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/PDF/HerculesSegers_painted-prints-introduction.pd



39. HERCULES SEGHERS *Large Ruin of the Abbey at Rijnsburg* (n.d.)

Etching, printed in yellow-white ink on black-brown-tinted paper (200 x 318 mm)

Comments by An van Camp:

The print is very unusual in using white ink on a dark background. Seghers uses tone rather than outline to render the dilapidated and overgrown ruins.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/PDF/HerculesSegers_painted-prints-introduction.pdf

40.CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH *Winter Landscape with Church* (c.1811)
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 45cm

41. ADRIAN ZINGG *The Prebischkegel in Saxon Switzerland* (c. 1800)
Sepia
51.2 x 68.1
Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden

42.Tree on Glencree *
O'Brien, Eoin. *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland* (p. 69).
Photograph by D. Davidson
*I am grateful to my Irish friend Andrew Clancy for identifying this tree as a hawthorn, and for reassuring me that it probably still stands in that very place.

43. ESAIS VAN DE VELDE, *The Large Square Landscape*
Etching (n.d)