

# Beckett and the World

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## Short of the World

The last words of *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Beckett's first volume of fiction to be published, conclude the diminuendo constituted by the gardener's reflections on the lifespan of roses with a dismissive shrug: 'So it goes in the world' (Beckett 1970, 2004). The world, or its word, makes a fleeting, but piercing appearance in *Worstward Ho*, Beckett's last substantial piece of published prose, as the narrative is proposing to itself a series of accelerating abbreviations: 'From now one for the kneeling one. As from now two for the twain... As from now three for the head') in order 'For to gain time. Time to lose. Gain time to lose. As the soul once. The world once' (Beckett 1983b, 20). The allusion is dual; to Dryden's *All For Love, or the World Well Lost* (1677) and Mark 8.36: 'what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (KJV; see also Matthew 16.26). In his semi-summons of this phrase into his text, Beckett equalises its antithesis. Now it is not a matter of gaining, or preserving one's soul ('that jakes' according to *Ill Seen Ill Said*) in preference to the world, but rather of garnering both in order that both may be 'well lost'. Where the 'so it goes' of *More Pricks Than Kicks* is sardonically offhand, 'the world once' has a gentler, more delicately decayed melancholy. It seems there was a world once, must have been perhaps, if it is now to be counted lost.

Human beings have spent millennia trying to live in the world, or trying to combat their willingness to eschew living in the world. Nearly every religion has tried to instil in its followers the precept that 'the world is too much with us', or we with the world. Quakers in particular developed the habit of referring to 'the world' as that which they have left behind or set themselves apart from: George Fox writes *A Word to the People of the World* (1660) and Mary Anderdon wrote from Exeter prison a pamphlet entitled *A Word to the World* (1662), a title that was frequently used by Quakers, Baptists, and other religious sects. Beckett's work exhibits something of this constitutive maladjustment to the world, a maladjustment out of which a kind of world may itself be made.

If the world presents difficulties, then so does 'the world', the concept or idea of the world. One might easily say of the idea of the world what St

Augustine said of tie, namely that we understand it perfectly well as long as nobody asks us what it means. Beckett's work is concerned not only with the understanding of the world, but also with the understanding of what might be called the world question. What makes a world? How can one live in the world? Where else could one live but in a world?

One of the few philosophers to have given sustained attention to the idea of world is Martin Heidegger. Chapter 3.1 of *Being and Time* is devoted to a discussion of 'the worldhood of the world'. This consists primarily for Heidegger in the assignedness of the world, which is always a world in-order-to or for-the-sake-of (*um etwas zu tun*), because '“for-the-sake-of” always pertains to the Being of Dasein, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an *issue*' (Heidegger 1985, 116-7). Dasein is always a 'being-in-the-world' and never merely being as such, because it is the essential function or vocation of Dasein to make sense of the world, to disclose it as world.

When he returned to the question of worldhood in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, first given as a lecture course in 1929-30 at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger sought to make this argument clearer by establishing a distinction between those beings which merely consist of their world, and those beings which are able to establish a relation to their world, and thereby bring it into being *as* a world. Heidegger distinguishes between the animal – his principal example is a lizard on a stone – who has an immediate or instinctive relation to the world, or rather to its world – and man who is open to the world 'as such'. He offers three theses that distinguish between stones animals and men, in terms of their relation to the world: 'the stone (material object) is worldless [*weltlos*]. [2.] the animal is poor in world [*weltarm*]; [3.] man is world-forming [*weltbildend*]. Animals, he writes are absorbed, or captivated by their worlds, and thus unable to have a relation to them:

We shall define *the animal's specific-being-alongside-itself* ... the absorption in itself of the animal, in which behavior of any and every kind is possible, as *captivation*. The animal can only behave insofar as it is captivated in its essence...Captivation is the condition of possibility for the fact that , in accordance with its essence, the animal *behaves within an environment but never within a world* (Heidegger 1995, 238-9)

The animal is not merely inert or insentient, like the stone: it has a kind of openness to what stimulates its action, but 'the possession of being open is a not-having and indeed a not-having of world, if the potentiality for

revelation of beings as such does indeed belong to world' (Heidegger 1995, 269-70).

Heidegger derives much support for his thinking about the nature of the animal's world from the work of the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll, who developed the notion that each animal exists not within the world as such, but rather in its own *Umwelt*, consisting only of the particular items of the world which have importance or significance for it. The most famous example is of *Ixodes ricinus*, or the European tick, which perches at the tip of a blade of grass waiting for a passing mammal to bump into it and dislodge it. Eyeless as it is, the world of the tick has only three components of significance: the odour of butyric acid which is contained in the sweat of all mammals; the skin characteristics of mammals (usually hairy and quite densely supplied with accessible blood vessels) and the temperature (typically 37°) of the blood of mammals. The rest of the world's complexity leaves it utterly unimpressed, so much so, in fact that, deprived of any of these prompts to action, a tick may remain in a state of suspended animation for many years. The European tick, as described so wonderfully by Uexküll (Uexküll and Kriszat 1992, 320-6), has travelled extremely widely in the hand-luggage of European philosophers, appearing as it does in the work of Heidegger, Deleuze, Serres and, most recently, Agamben.

Heidegger helped himself to Uexküll's argument that the world of an animal consists of those things which captivate its action and attention. The term *Umwelt* usefully chimes with the two aspects which Heidegger had argued in chapter 3 of *Being and Time* constitute the 'worldhood of the world' – first of all, the for-ness, or assignedness (the *um-zu*) of the world, and secondly, in the fact that the ready-to-hand world is always constituted 'regionally', and 'the regional orientation of the multiplicity of places belonging to the ready-to-hand goes to make up the aroundness – the "round-about-us" [das-Um-uns-herum] – of those entities which we encounter as closest environmentally' (Heidegger 1985, 136).

It is tempting to associate Heidegger's threefold distinction – man, animal and stone - with Malone's curriculum of the four, later three, stories he proposes to tell: 'I shall begin, that they may plague me no more, with the man and the woman. That will be the first story, there is not matter there for two. There will therefore be only three stories after all, that one, the one about the animal, then the one about the thing, a stone probably' (Beckett 1973, 182). It very possible that Beckett knew enough of Heidegger's modes of locution to have a swipe at him, in having Molloy claim that the 'meaning of being' was beyond him, especially as one of Beckett's friends at the Ecole Normale Supérieure was Jean Beaufret, whom Beckett later recalled as 'the Heidegger expert' (Knowlson 1996, 96). But, as Heidegger's lectures were

not published until 1983, it is not safe to assume any direct allusion. However, there is another intriguing assonance between Heidegger and Beckett, in the idea of ‘poverty in world’. In his *Three Dialogues With Georges Duthuit*, B. says "There is more than a difference of degree between being short, short of the world, short of self, and being without those esteemed commodities. The one is a predicament, the other not' (Beckett 1983, 143).

## Little World

In his writing of the 1920s and 1930s, Beckett tries everything he can to assert a retreat from what Murphy calls the ‘big world’ into the ‘little world’, the fine and private place of the head. It would be easy to see this movement repeated through the ever tighter constraints of the cylinder pieces, through to the oneiric spaces of *Nacht und Träume*, *Worstward Ho* and *Stirrings Still*. These acts of miniature mundation are anticipated towards the end of *The Unnamable*:

make a place, a little world, it will be round, this time, it's not certain, low of ceiling, thick of wall, why low, why thick, I don't know, it isn't certain, it remains to be seen, all remains to be seen, a little world, try to find out what it's like, try and guess, put someone in it, seek someone in it, and what he's like, and how he manages, it won't be I, no matter, perhaps it will, perhaps it will be my world, possible coincidence (Beckett 1973, 409)

This strain in Beckett accords with an espousal of a more conventional aesthetic aim of making autonomous worlds within worlds, or worlds against the world - for example where he praises Proust for the quality of his language which, he says, ‘makes no attempt to dissociate form from content. Form is the concretion of content, the revelation of a world.’ The punchline of the ‘Monde et le Pantalon’ joke given to Nell in *Endgame* expresses neatly Beckett's preference for the well-wrought world of the work of art over the messiness of the actual world: ‘ “But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look – [*disdainful gesture, disgustedly*] – at the world – [*pause*] – and look [*loving gesture, proudly*] – at my TROUSERS!” ’ (Beckett 1986, 103). The defiant preference for being without the world over being short of world expressed in the *Three Dialogues* might also seem to accord with this opposition both to the big world and the big word ‘world’.

But I would like to try to show in what follows that the condition of being *weltarm*, or short of world, is what constitutes the particular kind of

worldliness of Beckett's work, which is a work, not so much of trying to escape from the world as of trying to find a way to have your being, or, better still, to have had your being, in it. My surmise is that Beckett alternates between the two kinds of world: the world as such, which is almost always notional and inaccessible, and the particular world within which the finitude or being-there of a particular being or state of being is constituted.

Beckett has a strong sense of what Heidegger might call 'worlding', the creation of worlds. But his characters and narrators live, not within 'the world' or worlds as such, but within *Umwelts* that they constitute from themselves, or are constituted from themselves, not voluntarily, but unavoidably. As he wrote in *Proust*: 'Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals [...] The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day.' In Beckett's narratives from the 1940s onwards, the world does not so much recede as become intermittent, fluctuating, spasmodic, liable both to seeming extinguishings and sudden insurgences. 'Just at the moment when the world is assembled at last, and it begins to dawn on me how I can leave it, all fades and disappears', we hear in *The Unnamable* (Beckett 1973, 336-7). 'Little by little I got myself out and started walking with short steps among the trees, oh look, trees!' ('The Calmative', Beckett 1984, 36). 'From An Abandoned Work' is particularly full of these intemperate flarings of world, in the vision of the narrator's mother, framed in her window, the vision of the white horse crossing his path, the pursuit by stoats.

The paradox of Beckett's writing is that, while he continues to try, or feint to try, to detach his characters from 'the world', or to limn various forms of 'little world' against the 'big world' of the *polis*, a copular form of being-there is always necessary for him. This 'there' is coeval with existence, in that it is what existence starts out from, in both the temporal and spatial sense. In *Worstward Ho*, the positing of 'a body', even one gratefully disencumbered with mind, instantly requires 'A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in' (Beckett 1983b1983, 7). The irreducible condition of existence in Beckett's writing is that one must always have what being one has 'in such a place, and in such a world', as he says of the characters in *Endgame* ((Harmon 1998, 24).

It is in *The Unnamable* and even more tautly and paradoxically, in *Texts for Nothing* that this production of the sense of world takes place. *Texts for Nothing* may be seen as a long, discontinuous meditation on the possible meanings of the words 'here' and 'there'. The here and the there are part of the fabric of a world that must always already be there; and yet this world

also seems dubiously episodic. The *Texts for Nothing* are driven by the desire to find a way ‘to have being and habitat’ (Beckett 1984, 98), though the point of succeeding in being ‘there’ in the world, is to be able to cease being there. But this assurance of place and time is not merely, or continuously given, and the various speakers find themselves assailed by perplexities about the nature of their ‘here’ and ‘now’:

I must be getting mixed, confusing here and there, now and then, just as I confused them then, the here of then, the then of here, with other spaces, other times, dimly discerned, but not more dimly than now, now that I’m here, if I’m here, and no longer there. (Beckett 1984, 102)

The speaker in *Texts for Nothing* V testifies ‘I don’t know where I am’ (Beckett 1964, 85). In *Texts for Nothing* VI, the speaker longs for location: ‘I’d join them with a will if it could be here and now, how is it nothing is ever here and now? It’s varied, my life is varied. I’ll never get anywhere. I know, there is no one here, neither me nor anyone else’. (Beckett 1984, 89). Sometimes the narration seems to give up on the project of worldmaking: ‘Let there be no more talk of any creature, nor of a world to leave, nor of a world to reach, in order to have done, with worlds, with creatures’ (Beckett 1984, 100-1).

And yet, for all the anxiety and fatigue involved in dreaming up both being and a world to be in, it is not possible to abolish them altogether, since ‘being’ is always in fact compound or embedded, a hyphenated ‘being-here’, or a ‘being-there’. The resolution articulated at the end of *Text* X – ‘I’ll have gone on giving up, having had nothing, not being there’ (Beckett 1984, 106) is contradicted by the recognition that there is ‘[n]o point under such circumstances in saying I am somewhere else, someone else, such as I am I have all I need to hand, for to do what, I don’t know, all I have to do’ (Beckett 1984, 84). ‘I’m here, that’s all I know, and that it’s still not me’ (Beckett 1984, 81). ‘What elsewhere can there be to this infinite here?...Yes, I’m here for ever’ (Beckett 1984, 90).

This is to say, with Heidegger’s help, and as others similarly assisted have said before me, that Sein, for Beckett, is always Da-sein. But we should also recognise that this kind of being there is not up to the project of worlding that Heidegger sees as immanent to Dasein. The two aspects of Uexküll’s *Umwelt* that recommended themselves to are disjoined: one is always within a world, that is ‘um sich herum’, but the ‘um-zu’ of that world is never guaranteed. The finitude of being in the world, being in some particular circumstance, some here or other, is perfectly compatible with

indefiniteness: if one is out of place, it is always in some particular configuration.

Beckett's later works thematise this condition as that of the ghost, the figure who is both there and, as Amy claims in *Footfalls*, 'not there' (Beckett 1986, 43). But it should be remembered that the ghost has a curious relation to finitude, which means it is never entirely unearthly or out of this world. For ghosts, unlike gods and angels and sometimes demons, who have the gift of ubiquity, are traditionally tied to places, condemned for a certain time to walk the earth.

## Earth

'What counts', we hear in *Text IV*, 'is to be in the world, the posture is immaterial, so long as one is on earth' (Beckett 1984, 84). As I just suggested, this is perhaps because to be 'on earth, come into the world' means that one is 'assured of getting out' (Beckett 1984, 98). Though 'world' and 'earth', 'monde' and 'terre', often consort together and can readily be substituted for each other, Beckett does seem to maintain a distinction between them.

Again, I want to make out a clarifying difference from Heidegger, who considers the relation between world and earth in his essay, 'The Origin of the Work of Art'. Heidegger sees in the work of art a strife between world and earth. He means by world and earth an openness and a closure, respectively. The world is always an opening or revealing, a showing of the nature of something, or bringing of it to its being. The earth, simply because it is that which is experienced, is concealing and self-concealing. 'The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there. The work lets the earth be an earth' (Heidegger 1971, 45). One might say that the world were simply the disclosing of the closure of earth. The world produces the earth as earth, for 'To produce the earth means: to bring it into the open as that which closes itself in itself' (Heidegger 1971, 46).

The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.

The opposition of world and earth is a striving. (Heidegger 1971, 49)

Included among the many things Heidegger seems to want to mean by this striving is the contrariety of material and form. The earth, as ‘the massiveness and heaviness of stone,...the firmness and pliancy of wood,, ... the hardness and luster of metal,... the lighting and darkening of color,... the clang of tone’ (Heidegger 1971, 46), though subtending and supporting everything in the work of art, does not offer itself as an intelligible whole until it is lifted up into discernibility by that work. However, Heidegger strives to prevent this strife being understood in these simple terms, telling us, for example, that

The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world.... In essential striving... the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their natures... In the struggle, each opponent carries the other beyond itself... The earth cannot dispense with the Open of the world if it itself is to appear as earth in the liberated surge of its self-seclusion. The world, again, cannot soar out of the earth’s sight if, as the governing breadth and path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on a resolute foundation (Heidegger 1971, 49)

In a certain sense, Beckett’s practice might seem to shadow Heidegger’s claims. When Beckett’s narrators evoke the earth, it is to name something proximate, familiar, impending, but indistinct. The earth is often associated with the desire for merger or coalescence of identity. Molloy thinks of his ditch, ‘[h]ow joyfully I would vanish there, sinking deeper and deeper under the rains’ (Beckett 1973, 27-8). The narrator of ‘From An Abandoned Work’ tells us that

often now my murmur falters and dies and I weep for happiness as I go along and for love of this old earth that has carried me so long and whose uncomplainingness will soon be mine. Just under the surface I shall be, all together at first, then separate and drift, through all the earth. (Beckett 1984, 133-4)

Beckett’s characters often seem literally to have a global or geomorphic awareness of the earth, as a sphere or ‘earthball’. Molloy fixes the beginning of his journey to the middle of June through reflections on the hemisphere, while the narrator of ‘Enough’ evokes an eternal spring-like mildness – ‘As if the earth had come to rest in spring. I am thinking of our hemisphere.’ (158). The planetaria inhabited or projected by the speaker in *The Unnamable* and the listener in *Company* attest to this kind of astronomical grasp of global spaces. If these speakers move in blind orbits, they are geostationary ones.



Beckett's earth is perhaps also to be seen as closed or secluded in Heidegger's sense, precisely in the resistance to being understood as 'world' or 'the world'. The earth withholds or withdraws itself from being constituted as 'world' 'a world' or 'the world'. It is in this sense that all Beckett's characters are local, parochial, regional. It is never the world as such, but always one or other version of 'my part of the world' (a phrase used twice by Molloy, Beckett 1973, 17, 51) that is in question. But it is also true that the earth (and its correlative, the sky, which might be said to be a modality of earth) is open in another sense, namely that it is uncompleted, unordered and unbordered. So we have this odd sequence following Molloy's observation (itself repeatedly made through Beckett's work) of the lightening of the sky just before nightfall:

This phenomenon, if I remember rightly, was characteristic of my region. Things are perhaps different today. Though I fail to see, never having left my region, what right I have to speak of its characteristics. No, I never escaped, and even the limits of my region were unknown to me.. But I felt they were far away. But this feeling was based on nothing serious, it was a simple feeling. For if my region had ended no further than my feet could carry me, surely I would have felt it changing slowly. For regions do not suddenly end, as far as I know, but gradually merge into one another. And I never noticed anything of the kind, but however far I went, and in no matter what direction, it was always the same sky, always the same earth, precisely, day after day and night after night. (Beckett 1973, 65)

It is precisely because Molloy cannot be sure that he has ever escaped his 'region' that it becomes so vast, and potentially limitless: 'I preferred to abide by my simple feeling and its voice that said, Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall. And wheresoever you wander, within its distant limits, things will always be the same, precisely' (Beckett 1973, 65-6).

So Beckett's earth is both ineluctable and indefinable, extending beyond memory and experience, but also refusing to be levered or rounded out into anything like the condition of 'a world'. Where Heidegger sees the work of art as the struggle of world to lift earth up into openness, Beckett's work, whether of art or not, strives to keep open the discretion of earth, or earth's withholding of itself from world.

## **Worlding**

Heidegger insists that the world ‘is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are just there.’ And yet it is also more than just the abstract idea of the world in general. Rather,

the *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds. (Heidegger 1971, 44)

When we say ‘globalisation’, we mean that world is more and more, and perhaps more and more pinchingly, becoming one world,. But perhaps we also name this strange sense that ‘the world’ is becoming more palpable than the ‘actual’ places and regions in which we may have our being. Heidegger’s account of the worlding of the world (or, rather, more reflexively, the world ‘worlding’), as a disclosing of the ‘as-such’ of the world has recently been resumed and amplified in Michel Serres’s account of what he calls ‘hominescence’, which consists of much more than the increased integration between different areas of the human world. Where animals of different species inhabit different and noncommunicating *Umwelts*, human beings are building a technological masterworld:

Whether in the ensemble of signals all kinds accessible as signs by the totality of living beings; our various devices tend to the reconstruction of this ensemble, like the sum of the habitats – our own, or each individual of our own - which each species carves out from its environment. Are we thus tending, at least asymptotically, towards a global reality, an integral of these spaces and times, the niches and durations of each species and by unifying them, to the beginning of integration? (Serres 2001, 145-6; my translation)

Serres proposes that we are some way advanced into the creation of what he calls a ‘Biosom’, which composes ‘the complex, intersecting global space-time of the ensemble of all living creatures of this world’ ((Serres 2001, 147; my translation).

This involves much more than the joining together of places or the shrinking of gaps and distances. It involves the synchronisation of world time too. As Heidegger’s rapt evocations of destiny suggest, the worlding or

worlded world is temporal as well as spatial. The word ‘world’ in fact derives from a Germanic root *wer-* man, and *ald* – age, the primary signification therefore being ‘the age of man’. World signifies, therefore, not a place, or environment, but a span of existence (the time of your life). It is doubtless for this reason that the OED gives as the primary meaning of the word ‘world’ usages that emphasise this temporal sense, as man’s present life, in this world, as opposed to the world to come. That the idea of ‘the world’ has always hitherto had some sense of the persistence of a form of being in time, and therefore necessarily therefore of limited duration, is suggested by the phrase ‘world without end’. The world must be something that can come to an end, as in Malone’s rapt lunar vision of the ‘Dead world, waterless, airless’ (Beckett 1973, 201), or the vision entertained by Molloy that seems to anticipate it:

a world collapsing endlessly, a frozen world, under a faint untroubled sky, enough to see by, yes, and frozen too. ... here nothing stirs, has ever stirred, will ever stir, except myself, who do not stir either, when I am there, but see and am seen. Yes, a world at an end, in spite of appearances, its end brought it forth, ending it began, is it clear enough? (Beckett 1973, 40)

We can, I think, posit a perverse conversation between Beckett’s insistence on considering the ends of man and man’s contemplation of the fact that ‘the world’ is definitively, though certainly not irreversibly, entering its condition as the ‘the age of man’.

### **Something Out of Beckett**

Some of the most dubious *obiter dicta* ascribed to Beckett appeared in an obituary in the *Boston Globe*: ‘ “There are no landmarks in my work,” Mr. Beckett once said. “We are all adrift. We must invent a world in which to survive, but even this invented world is pervaded by fear and guilt. Our existence is hopeless.” ’ (Quoted, Campbell 1989, 67). These words have the authentically naff ring of the manufactured quotation, foisted on and extracted from the ‘corpse-obliging’ Beckett. But the idea of a distinctively ‘Beckett world’ is of course very strong. Reporting on the 1992 Beckett Festival in The Hague, the *Samuel Beckett Stichting* observed that ‘From 1 to 16 April 1992 the city of The Hague was immersed in the world created by Samuel Beckett’ (‘Samuel Beckett Festival and Symposium’). Other reports during this centenary year have reflected on the conjunctions and interferences between ‘Beckett’s world’ and ‘the world’. CBS News offered a slightly more intriguing spin on this by remarking that ‘The world may have

caught up with Beckett.’ (‘Beckett Embraced By Native Land’). The rivalry between ‘the world’ and Beckett’s world’ becomes almost sinister in Michael Hall’s remark that ‘In his centenary year, the spectre of Beckett is more visible than ever, with events taking place around the world to celebrate his work’ (Hall 2006). Beckett seems to acknowledge his own relation to the ‘Beckett world’ in the reference, in an early draft of *That Time* in the University of Reading, to ‘the old scenes you lived in so long and the people stopping to look at you like something out of Beckett sitting there on the step’ (MS1477/2).

Curiously enough, the consolidation of the ‘Beckett world’, with its familiar landmarks, languages, and local customs, has assisted rather than impeded the absorption of Beckett into the ‘big world’ Beckett not only plays, but presumably also pays in capitals across the world, to audiences who have as strong a pre-understanding of what is to be expected from ‘the world of Beckett’ as readers of Dickens do of ‘the world of Dickens’ or Terry Pratchett fans do of *Discworld*. It would be foolish to pretend that the condition of becoming a ‘world author’ is unique to Beckett, or to search for the particular forms of universality that might account for the steadily increasing reach of his work. The amplification and ramification of his work and the idea of his work, the ‘world’ of his work, are just what we should expect. (Though let us not overstate this, either: ‘Beckett’ has nowhere near the reach or tradeability of an average gone-tomorrow model or film-star. If Beckett is going global, then it is as a kind of ‘global niche’, a paradox that gets us to the heart of what we might mean by globalism today.)

Nor, by contrast, do I seek to encourage the work of enforced repatriation that is being undertaken by those who seek to assert the essential regionality of Beckett’s work – its ‘Irishness’, its ‘Protestantism, and so on. I think that, following the critical work being undertaken on the work of Joyce, by writers such as Emer Nolan and Andrew Gibson (however different they may be on their approaches), which seeks to weaken the consensus about Joyce’s cosmopolitan modernism made by writers such as Ellmann and Kenner and bring Joyce back home, we will see similar efforts to distort Beckett back into ethnic intelligibility. Indeed the global and the local, the ahistorical and the atavistic, act in perfect consort here. Both Joyce and Beckett have become the PR darlings of the Celtic Tiger, with its assertions of European Ireland, cosmopolitan Ireland – ‘World Ireland’.

But the worlding of the world, the production of the world as such finds a resistance and a complication in the work of Beckett. If Beckett’s work needs to be seen as a kind of unworlding, a dyspeptic block to the project of Heideggerean worlding, then it may perhaps also be seen as a reflection of and on the nature of this worlding. Globalism means many things – among

them the imposition on more and more of the world of risibly particularised and parochial notions of what the world should be. But, in political and philosophical terms, it might also be thought to name an incipient, but growing work of reflection on the same kind of questions that animate Beckett's peculiarly worldly work – the work he conducts on 'world'. Questions like: What is a world? Can one live in such a thing? Or out of it? What worlds have there been, and what might there be? Can a world be made? Can one help making worlds? Of course, Beckett's work gives us no obvious guidance on such matters – why on earth or anywhere else should we expect such a thing? – but he does instance for us a singular resolve to decline any grandiose worlding of the world, while also denying us and itself the consolation of ever being able to live out of this world.

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