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The Topos of the *Mound* in Samuel Beckett's Writing

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Abstract

This essay aims to bring to the fore the varied and broad valences of the 'mound' in Beckett's *oeuvre*. In my reading, the mound functions as a profuse, multi-purpose symbol, that coalesces into a variety of *topoi* indicative of Mother Earth, that figure in the thighs, the nipples, the pubis/pubic area and bones, ruins, ants, birth, fetus, and elemental maternal death. I embarked upon the present study before the commencement of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project, a collaborative project between the Centre for Manuscript Genetics at the University of Antwerp, the Beckett International Foundation, the University of Reading and Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin. Valorising the author's editing, additions, notes and comments provided by the upcoming digitalized manuscripts of Beckett in 2014 and 2015, I expect to contribute to the work in progress, and to the corpus of Beckett studies in general, especially those approaching his bilingual works. It is my contention that the frequency of certain terms, the diagrams that Beckett included in some of his letters (as is the case of the *mound* in *Happy Days*), shed significant light on the nature of his symbolism.

Keywords: *topos*; mound; rock/stone; earth; birth; death; fetus; Venus; ants; ruins

Who knows if life is not death and death life?
Euripides

For almost two years, from January 1934 through to December 1935, Beckett underwent psychoanalytic therapy with W. R. Bion in London, during which time he embarked upon an extensive study of

psychoanalysis and psychology. Conversant with philosophical in his twenties, and later, on a broader scale, with psychoanalysis, Beckett made ample notes on both subjects. His *Philosophy Notes* and *Psychology Notes*¹ testify to his obsessive reading of a number of prominent figures in both spheres, from Descartes to Schopenhauer, to Freud, Jung, Jones and Rank. As a young critic, his early conversance with the philosophical works of Arthur Schopenhauer, especially *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), led him to a rather naïve but strong application of the ‘will’ to Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913), entitled *Proust*, finely sketched by J. D. O’Hara (13-33). He read “Schopenhauer on Women” (1851), (*Letters* 509) as a diversion in 1937, but as Weller points out, “. . . over two decades later Beckett took up Schopenhauer’s various (highly misogynistic) claims about women in his essay “Über die Weiber” and used them fairly systematically in his characterization of Winnie in *Happy Days* (written in 1960-61)” (Weller 135). Moreover, the *Psychology Notes* are replete with specialized terms to be traced back to Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), *The Pleasure Principle* (1895), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *Character and Anal Eroticism* (1908), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Ernest Jones’s “Anal-Erotic Character Traits”, a chapter in his *Papers on Psycho-Analysis* (1913), Otto Rank’s *The Trauma of Birth* (1924), etc. Further, Beckett’s cognizance of such theories is disclosed by the explicit overuse of psychoanalytical jargon, to the verge of banality, spread out in his early works in the thirties, but which grows increasingly more implicit in his later oeuvres, both fictional and dramatic.

Baker and O’Hara both delve deep into the world of psychoanalysis (the former mostly incorporates Freud and Rank while the latter focuses on Jung and Freud) to disclose how Beckett succeeded in connecting psychoanalytic concepts to the percepts and images he created in his writing. The sigmoidal (S-shaped, fetus-like) figures, the concepts of birth and death, the fetal posture, earth (the Mother Earth), obsession, repetition (in both Freud and Beckett implying *Thanatos*), anal-eroticism, anal-sadistic phase, anal-retentive characters, *schmutzig*(ness) or *verschmutzung*, muck, oozing (Maude 108), cloister, placenta, displacement (both Freudian and Proustian), the family (father, mother,

child/the son), family romances, infancy (old tot), the sexual drive or libido (Obidil in *Molloy* (1951), orderliness, parsimoniousness, obstinacy (all three akin to anal fixation at an early age), whiteness (the whiteness of the three wolves in a dream by one of Freud's patients), the white mother, the talking cure, *amor matris*, *timor patris*, symmetry (especially that of *Molloy*), anal time, culture and art, the mythic womb, the trauma of birth, the pleasure principle, the oceanic feeling, the dream screen, narcissism, object relations, mysticism, the wellhead eye, the mirror-stage (via eye-contact), etc. are linked, especially by Phil Baker, to the body, blood, feces, excrement, urination and defecation, cowpats, rubbish, stone, bachelor machines (especially bicycles), hats, stools, spools, rocking chairs, beds, crap/Krapp (implying mourning and melancholia), light, mound, ants, Malacoda, the imago, rectum, etc. throughout his book.

The inventory above points to the welder of as yet unexplored psychological and philosophical aspects inherent in Beckett's corpus. In the following, I seek to observe the close affinities between some of the concepts mentioned above and one of Beckett's central motifs, especially as illustrated in *Happy Days* (1961) and *Waiting for Godot* (1952), the 'mound'. Throughout his oeuvre, Beckett places his characters on a rock, stone or mound. In *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) Belacqua, the predecessor of Winnie, Vladimir and Estragon, takes a fetal posture on a piece of rock. Be it rock, mound, stone, or pebbles (all of psychological significance in both Freud and Beckett as will be discussed), they occur as images and motifs in Beckett's shorter fiction in various ways as well. Critics and readers have usually referred to such motifs, especially the 'mound', as representing the Mother Earth, but evidently there is more to that. Beckett makes the mound and ants coincide in *Happy Days*. He has one door set between two pillars, the door being "greatly admired" in *The Expelled* (1950). In *First Love* (1973), the pillars and the door are replaced by two trees and a 'mound' enclosing a bench on three sides by still water where the lovers are seated. Baker, quite passingly, comments on the sexual overtones of these two passages, and regards them as subtexts to the main ones (77-93). He fails to grasp the intentions of the author, or intends to do so, when he comments on the latent sexuality of the images. In other words, Baker takes it for granted that the author has intended the

image ripe with meaning. He knows that Beckett does not render a recurring object, now made into a motif, unsystematically.

1. THE MOUND OF VENUS

*I was given a penum, at birth perhaps, as a
punishment for having been born perhaps.
The Unnamable*

Originally composed in French, *En attendant Godot*, opens with the following stage direction: “*Estragon, assis sur une pierre, essaie d’enlever sa chaussure*” (Godot 9). In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett translated ‘pierre’ (meaning ‘stone’ or ‘rock’) as ‘low mound’. *Happy Days*, originally composed in English, starts with the stage direction, “*Expanse of scorched grass rising to low mound. Gentle slopes down to front and either side of stage. Back an abrupt fall to stage level. Maximum of simplicity and symmetry*” (Happy Days 9). In *Oh les beaux jours*, Beckett translated ‘low mound’ into ‘mamelon’ (also meaning ‘nipple’). Belacqua has “tears in his eyes” when “creeping about in a rock-garden” (*More Pricks* 94). Rocks, mounds, stones and pebbles are associated with stillness, love and death. As Baker observes,

Beckett told his friend Gottfried Buttner in 1967 that as a child he would pick up stones from the beach and carry them home, where he would build nests for them and put them in trees to protect them from the sea (Buttner 67). He describes his relationship to stone as ‘almost a love relationship’ [Ibid.] and associated it with death, telling Buttner of Freud having written that ‘man carried with him a kind of congenital yearning for the mineral kingdom’ (Buttner’s paraphrase). Beckett’s remarks followed a discussion of death and ‘petrifying’ after the medically trained Buttner had spoken of ‘sclerotic traits’ in Krapp. We can recognize Beckett’s Freud reference to be to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; Beckett/Buttner’s ‘congenital yearning for the mineral kingdom’ is Freud’s ‘most universal endeavour of all living substance—namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world’. (139)

A close scrutiny of the word, *mound*, offers revealing connotations and insights. One such connotation is closely akin to the concepts of birth and death, and the relation between them. A definition of the term means,

Mound of Venus, equivalent to *Mons Veneris* or the more *Venus-Tellus* telltale term, *Mons Pubis*. The appellation simply refers to the fleshy area over the pubic bones, a prominence made by the pad of fat overlying the junction of pubic bones in females. In *Act I* of *Happy Days*, Winnie is placed inside the low mound up to her waist. In *Act II*, as time has passed and the shadow of death has grown nearer, she is buried in the mound up to her neck. She has almost embraced and is embraced by Mother Earth. She is literally inside the womb of the earth. In fact, ‘Womb-symbolism’ and the ‘Intra-Uterine Life’ run throughout Beckett. As Baker argues, “Death and *burial* are a return to mother earth and the womb for Rank (114-16), as is sleep” (70, emphasis mine). Rank delineates the “identification of death with a return to the mother” (25). And this identification, Baker observes, is all present in the author’s oeuvres. This image permeates throughout *Godot*. Estragon is sitting on a mound, his position thus, resembling that of a fetus, ‘being there’, over the fleshy area over the pubic bones. The word *sitting* makes Estragon bear a far greater resemblance to a fetus, as he has put his foot on his knee ‘bending over’ to take off his boot by force. This may be further supported by a few more pertinent stage directions in the second act of the play, “He [Estragon] looks for a place to sit down, then goes and sits down on the mound” (1). Then after a brief talk with Vladimir, “He resumes his *fetal* posture, his head between his knees” (76, emphasis mine). That Beckett deploys the very term, ‘fetal’ is redolent enough for the reader of what the puppeteer does to his puppet in *Act Without Words I* (1965). The subtitle of this playlet, or this act reads, *A Mime for One Player*. In this mime, Beckett presents humans’ deliverance into the world. As always, the puppeteer gets to the core of his intention; the marionette is born in the second line of the mime, “The man is flung backward on stage from right wing. He falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects” (1). In these first few lines there are the implications of our birth and deliverance into the world in a falling movement descending on the back. And the moment we are born, we initiate and even ‘resume struggles’. What makes this typical scene a monumental motif throughout the mime, is that it is repeated three more times at a row, except one which appears almost at the end. The point is clear. The man, after being flung backward, is old

enough not only to struggle, but to die as well. The marionette is dead by the time he is born. Thus Estragon is born to earth. What could be further conducive to realization of this conception are two other stage directions appearing right after the ones aforementioned when Vladimir goes over to sit beside Estragon, and shortly afterward Estragon starts sleeping, an ‘Oblomov-like symptom’, a death symbol and a sign of Rankian ‘improper birth’. Beckett’s own ‘womb fixation’ was reflected in the “simple inclination to stay in bed” and his “deep-seated need to pay frequent visits to his mother” (Bair in Baker 68).

If Gogo and Didi can stand for *humanity* in general² then Vladimir’s going over to sit beside Estragon gives it more universality in that the two *born*, exposed-to-the-world beings, take solace in a nightmarish sleep, and in a deadening silence.

Along the same lines, one should not miss the point that the mound (the earth) is a female figure, as well as Venus, the goddess of love. True is also the fact that the Mound of Venus, as observed before, is a part of the female body and a mother figure. Therefore, Vladimir and Estragon, placed on this mound, are facing downward not only to where they are delivered, but to their own grave as well. It seems that life and birth for Beckett are the ever present conditions of guilt, as stated in *The Unnamable*, “. . . and come back to earth again, by way of the vagina like a real live baby, and reach a ripe age, and even senility, without the least assistance from them and thanks solely to the hints they had given me” (332-333). This voice has even tried to take revenge on it (where we are conceived from) earlier where he feels “upset at having been delivered so economically of a pack of blood relations, not to mention the two cunts into the bargain, the one for ever accursed that ejected me into this world and the other, infundibuliform, in which, pumping my likes, I tried to take my revenge” (325).

2. MOUND AS ANT-HOLE/NEST

Beckett’s letters to Alan Schneider reveal that at the time of the composition of *Happy Days*, he was heavily burdened with a number of productions, but in a number of diagrams that he included, he managed to

detail what the construction of the *mound* in the play would be like. Finally, he told Brenda Bruce what he actually had in mind about the props and the *mis-en-scene* of *Happy Days*:

Well I thought that the most dreadful thing that could happen to anybody, would be not to be allowed to sleep so that just as you're dropping off there'd be a 'Dong' and you'd have to keep awake; you're sinking into the ground alive and it's full of *ants*; and the sun is shining endlessly day and night and there is not a tree . . . there's no shade, nothing, and that bell wakes you up all the time and all you've got is a little parcel of things to see you through life. . . . And I thought who would cope with that and go down singing, only a woman. (Knowlson 501, emphasis mine)

In the play, we have once only the appearance of an egg-carrying ant which Winnie calls 'emmet' (23), an archaic word meaning ant. Then she inquires, "Where's it gone?" (Inspects.) Ah! . . . Has like a little white ball in its arms. . . . It's gone in. . . . Like a little white ball." To this Willie (a common British euphemism for penis) responds, "Eggs", and then uses the term, 'formication' (24). Winnie repeats "Like a little white ball" twice to emphasize the sexual overtone interjected by "It's gone in." She already knows she is past that stage, an obsession she carries with her throughout the play. The way the word 'ball' is pronounced recalls the eroticism associated with the enunciation 'drool', and especially of the plosive and laxative 'spool' in *Krapp*, suggested by John Weighman (Baker 57). Ernest Jones also indicates "the displacement of libido from anal activities to phonation"³ (56). 'Mamelon', the French translation of the 'mound', means 'nipples' further adding to the erotic character of the egg-and-ball scene. On a psychoanalytic basis, both 'white' and 'ball', as well as 'eggs' have sexual connotations in Beckett, that relate to birth and death. Beckett suggests that Willie "is laughing at the image of ants devouring [Winnie] and she at the image of the ants devouring herself" (*Corres.* 103). In medicine and pathology, 'formication' is a sensation of insects crawling on the skin, which is a symptom of a nerve disorder, but it also highlights *fornication*. The resemblance between the shape of the nests that Mound Ants and megapodes make, and the appearance of the female reproductive tract is striking. This issue leads us through the channel to where the topic under the entry of 'Mons Veneris' led us.

Among the other meanings of the mound is ‘the heap of earth, dead leaves and other refuse in which certain megapodes (‘mound-builders’) place their eggs.’ Elsewhere we read, “Amongst the objectionable species the Mound Ant (*Iridomyrmex detectus*) is prominent; its huge nests are particularly destructive to garden paths.” Under a further explanation we have: “The Mound Ants from their great gravel nests in the grassy plains, scouring in search of food . . . to the dead body of some horse or sheep which has perished in time of drought, the marauders issuing from holes in the carcass in long streams, each ant bearing a fragment of flesh in its jaw.” The most striking resemblance seems to be between the tracts, the openings, and also the reproduction that takes place in them. If certain megapodes place their eggs in their mounds (nests), in the same way, eggs are planted in the Mounds of Venus, whence offspring are born. The comparison between Ant nests and the mound where Gogo and Didi are sitting, leads us to infer that Mound Ants “scouring in search of food . . . each bearing a fragment of flesh in its jaw” resemble ‘mound men [who] had feasted probably during ‘hard times’ on their own species” (*Oxford*).

3. MOUND OF MORT

*Birth was the death of him.
A Piece of Monologue*

As a definition of the mound, we read “A woman’s thighs will be your guillotine, and her mound of Venus your Tarpeian Rock.”⁴ This line serves as a leading instance among others, which literally sheds more light on the miserable predicament of humanity. According to the etymology of ‘Tarpeian’, It appears to date back to the “early 17th- century. Named for Tarpeia, legendary daughter of the commander of the citadel, which she betrayed to the Sabines;⁵ she was reputedly buried at the foot of the rock” (*Encarta*). Along the same lines, the Tarpeian rock itself means, “a rock on the Capitoline Hill in ancient Rome, from which traitors were hurled to their deaths.” This once again leads us spontaneously through the symmetrical parallelism between the Mound of Venus and the Tarpeian Rock. In a sense, Winnie has taken *refuge* in earth, in the mound, making it her home as the narrator in *The Expelled* associates “refuge and death”

(Baker 77) with the house. Baker further explicates this as follows:

The narrator [of *The Expelled*] admires the lost paradise of the house: . . . 'I would have Gladly died in that house' He muses further on the house And its 'greatly admired' door: 'The door was set between two pillars'. Given the birth subtext these pillars suggest *thighs*, and Such anatomical resonances somatise Heideggerian 'thrownness' (otherwise comparable to the opening of Act Without Words I, where the being is thrown into a bright void. (*Plays*, 43, emphasis mine)

Baker conceives of a birth subtext in this passage (itself related to death as already observed) and relates it to the *Mime* as I have drawn some parallels between this and the stance of Gogo and Didi. As explicated above, 'thigh' is an image that has close affinities with the 'mound' motif. Some fifteen pages later, Baker points out a parallel between the text in *The Expelled* and another in *First Love*. The door and the two pillars are replaced by a *mound* and two trees. The narrator's courtship by Lulu/Anna, a sexual encounter, makes the scene even more significant. The setting is by still water where there is a bench on which they meet each other. They are "pleasantly enclosed on three sides by a *mound* and two trees, recovering the 'guarded on three sides only' hall space that he has left" (93, emphasis mine). Baker observes that, "As well as their anatomical symmetry, like the thigh-like pillars beside the door that expels *The Expelled*, the dead trees make an ironically moribund courtship setting. Less obvious is the suggestion that their sexual encounter as narrated might be a screen-memory" (93).

Thus If Estragon is sitting on the Mound, a Tarpeian Rock, then he is probably situated over the 'abyss of being', at any given moment in the double jeopardy of being hurled to his death, and buried like Tarpeia. If below the Tarpeian Rock there is the grave, below the Mound of Venus, there is the vagina.

This, for Beckett, is therefore an origin, of both reproduction (birth), and death (grave). There is still another meaning under the entry of 'mound': "An artificial elevation of earth or stones, a tumulus, esp. the earth heaped up upon a *grave*." The earth heaped up upon a grave becomes the mound over the female reproductive tract connecting the cervix of the womb to the vulva; that is, the mound is the earth to which

his people are born, as the female tract is the grave through which they have passed.

Birth is for Beckett nothing but mere sin for which he has to repent. But this sin is an irredeemable one, never to be paid off: "Vladimir: Suppose we repented. / Estragon: Repented what? / Vladimir: Oh . . . (He reflects.) We wouldn't have to go into the details. / Estragon: Our being born? (3).

Further proof to Beckett's notions of life and death are Pozzo's stance toward the conceptions of birth and death in a small pertinent solo speech he makes in *Act II*, when pestered by Vladimir questioning him about what time exactly Lucky went dumb:

(suddenly furious). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for Calmer. They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then night once more. (57)

By the end of the play, Beckett is no longer implying things, but instead he puts his thematic intentions in their utmost clarity into the mouths of his people. To him, the same day, even the same second when they were born, they were dead. And they are born 'astride of a grave'; that is, they fall directly into the grave the very *second* they are delivered. Then the life they live is but an instant, like that of a gleaming light, after which they are once more immersed into the heart of darkness, into blackness, into death. In his rather long solo performance in *Act I*, Pozzo likens the whole period of one's life to the length of a day when,

. . . An hour ago (*he looks at his watch, prosaic*) roughly (*lyrical*) [the sky] after having poured forth ever since (*he hesitates, prosaic*) say ten o'clock in the morning (*lyrical*) tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale . . . paler until (*dramatic pause, ample gesture of the two hands flung wide apart*) pppfff! finished! It comes to rest. . . . just when we least expect it. (*Silence. Gloomily.*) That's how it is on this bitch of an earth. *Long silence.* (25)

In Pozzo's speech, even the suddenness of death is implied "when we

least expect it.” Life is but an evanescent moment coming to its endgame, all finished, not with a whimper, but a sudden bang. However, the last line in which the earth (the mound, or the more implicative Mons Veneris) is compared to a bitch, a female figure, is noteworthy and to be emphasized. Nothing can be more indicative than these words spoken by Vladimir by the end of the play, through which Beckett juxtaposes in the most explicit way, birth and death, birth and the grave, and birth and the hole: “Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps” (58).

4. MOUND AS EARTH

*I may add that my seat would appear to be somewhat
elevated, in relation to the surrounding ground, if
ground is what it is. . . . What I best see I see ill.*
The Unnamable

Sweet Mother Earth.
Waiting for Godot

Winnie, a fiftyish plump well preserved woman is embedded up to her “big bosom” (*Happy Days* 9) in a mound of earth, “the Mother Earth symbol to end all other mother earth symbols” (Brater 34). Estragon (Adam) is sitting on a mound. The first association of ‘mound’ striking the mind is ‘earth’. This is the first and commonest meaning of ‘mound’: ‘The world; the earth as man’s abode.’ Estragon occupies the mound as humanity occupies the earth. And when “you’re on earth, there’s no cure for that!” (*Endgame* 53). In his works, Beckett usually presents his people as willing to occupy the earth, especially the ‘center’. Thus speaks the voice in *The Unnamable* (1953), expressing what humanity throughout the ages has been obsessed with, that is, with placing itself fixedly at the center, or at least making believe that it is there so as to make the impression that it is still human beings occupying the center, “I like to think I occupy the center, but nothing is less certain. In a sense I would be better off at the circumference, since my eyes are always fixed in the same direction” (406-7).

In his celebrated play *Endgame* (1957), Beckett presents Hamm as

entertaining the same obsession with occupying the center as does the voice in *The Unnamable*. The legless armless 'I' of the latter one enjoys eyes but defective, feeling the tears pouring constantly out from them. Hamm, on the other hand, is absolutely blind, yet his will to center makes his status even more ridiculous, since he continually asks Clov to 'bang' [him] right in the 'center', and still worse, he decides himself at times whether he is right 'there' or not, "I was right in the center, wasn't I?" to which Clov responds "Yes". After he goes round his world (the stage), and hugs the walls, Hamm orders Clov to return him and "Bang [him] in the center." Hamm grown is still a grudging baby disquieted at not being given his pacifier to suck, but when granted, seeks another plaything to pacify his ever growing disquietude. Thus, the identification of the body with a toy becomes as vital to the child as does that of the cosmological problem of existence with a will-to-center obsession in Hamm who "feels a little too far to the left. . . . to the right. . . . forward. . . . far back" (27) while Clov moves his chair slightly each time. Hamm blind is mankind eyeless/I-less having defective eyes/I's proving existence through his Wormish will to ruling over the entire mound.

Having undergone the excruciation of deliverance, Beckett's people become the typically corpse-like breathing beings, ever endeavoring to convince the brutally reasoning minds of theirs of the status in which they have got stuck, un-conceiving the perceived, un-answering the lethally questioning faculty as where from and why delivered, and where to they are heading. The only thing they are certain of among the uncertainties is that they have been cast on to a ball of earth, on to a mound. This, once again, recalls the scene of being flung backward on stage in *Act Without words I* in which the stage becomes the earth (mound) on which the man is flung, or thrown.

5. THE MOUND AS POWER

The 'mound' also connotes 'power, strength; value, importance, dignity' (*Oxford*). Vladimir muses about 'the Eiffel Tower', 'the top' and 'respectability' when Estragon is still seated on the mound. In fact, Estragon sitting on the mound no doubt typifies all the abstract concepts

given above whose full embodiment we find in Pozzo in *Godot*, Hamm in *Endgame*, Mr. Knott in *Watt*, and the mysterious figure in black jellaba listening to the interrogation in *Catastrophe*. Moran in *Molloy*, who is sent on errands by an invisible chief called Youdi, is obsessed with this notion of power which in many cases turns into tyranny. Even in *Texts for Nothing* (1950), the same idea looms in. And the voice in *The Unnamable* is never certain who his master is: "I have spoken for my master, listened for the words of my master never spoken. Well done, my child, well done, my son, you may stop, you may go, you are free, you are acquitted, never spoken" (312). And he proceeds to talk about what and who they are and what they may do to him: "There may be more than one, a whole college of tyrants, differing in their views as to what should be done with me, in conclave since time began or a little later" (312). However, Jean-Jacques Mayoux believes that, "... metaphysical cruelty", (for instance in *Molloy*) "is only a fable invented by man in his state of abandonment." Beckett has in different situations put the words 'I invented it all' into the mouths of his people to "... help me go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end", *The Unnamable* (316), [a fable which is a] "projection of himself, a reflection of all the things that seem on the human plane to reflect it." [This 'it' is the old] "paternal tyranny and cruelty, all the manifestations of the father-figure in human affairs toward the figure of the son in all its various forms" (Hoffman 98). Lucky, who is cruelly maltreated under the tyranny of Pozzo, treats Estragon in the same way when Estragon decides to help him, discouraged by Lucky's kicking him in the shin. In the same manner, Moran who is under some tyrannical Powers, tortures his own son 'sadistically', "You leave both your albums at home, I said, the small one as well as the large one" (Hoffman 99).

Back to Lucky's speech, we have, "the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull" (29). The reader might have by now perceived the implications of the accompaniment of 'the flames' and 'the tears' with 'the stones'. But these flames are not limited to the sufferings of only a small group of people, but the whole humanity. Lucky is, as are most of us, eaten away at the vision of an unforgiving deity,

. . . Quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua . . . who . . . loves us
dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell . . .
with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in fire
whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the
firmament. (28)

Vladimir and Estragon may have once been among those *powerful* and *respectable* people, just like Pozzo. As Vladimir muses, “Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it’s too late. They wouldn’t even let us up” (2).

Beckett replaced the more suggestive term ‘representable’ for ‘respectable’ in his later version of the play, but what is more important in the light of *representability* or respectability, is their standing on ‘top’ of the Tower, among the ‘first’. As the symbolism of ‘tower’ guides us through its different layers of meaning, the previous contentions grow more and more clarified.

“In the Egyptian system of hieroglyphs, the tower is a determinative sign denoting height or the act of rising above the *common level* in life or society. Basically, then, the tower is symbolic of ascent” (Cirlot 344, emphasis mine). The analogy between man and the tower sheds still more light on this matter, “. . . for just as the tree is closer to the human figure than are the horizontal forms of animals, so, too, is the tower the only structural form distinguished by verticality: windows at the topmost level, almost always large in size, correspond to the eyes and the mind of man. . . . However, it is possible to discover a dual tendency in the symbolism of the tower. Its upward impulse may be accompanied by a deepening movement” (345). Therefore, it is no wonder if Vladimir and Estragon have descended now from the tower (Nietzsche talks of descent during ascent). Estragon sitting on a *low* mound has typically descended to the level of the earth, the world, the earth as man’s abode (of stones). If we take another meaning of ‘mound’ (globe) into consideration, then the status of the viceroy becomes more conceivable.

6. THE MOUND AS ORB

The mound is also defined as “An orb or ball of gold or other precious material, intended to represent the globe of the earth; often surmounting a crown, or otherwise forming part of the insignia of royalty.” It is further explained as “Also . . . a figure of this, as a bearing; often used as including the cross which commonly surmounts the ‘mound’ properly so called” (*Oxford*). The vision of the viceroy is incomplete without the crown. Estragon sitting on a mound is at the very start of the play asked by Vladimir “May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?” (9), to which Estragon’s answer is what will be another meaning of mound, the ensuing topic of our discussion. This, however, is no new insignia in Beckett’s corpus, as we can find typical counterparts for Vladimir and Estragon in, say *Endgame*, embodied in the figure of Hamm whose throne is his chair, and his kingdom, the stage.

Another indication reveals itself when at one point in the play Vladimir and Estragon speak about the rights and prerogatives of mankind:

Estragon: Where do we come in?
Vladimir: Come in?
Estragon: Take your time.
Vladimir: Come in? On our hands and knees.
Estragon: As bad as that?
Vladimir: Your worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?
Estragon: We’ve no rights anymore? . . . We’ve lost our rights?
Vladimir: (*distinctly*). We got rid of them. (19)

This is the second time Vladimir addresses Estragon as if he (Estragon) were a king, or a viceroy. But they are the typical human beings who have no longer any rights over their own kingship. Unlike the classic human viceroys, who spent their lives in Heavenly Palaces, they spend days and nights in the ‘ditch’, the ‘hole’, and the ‘pit’. Vladimir and Estragon know clearly that they are not decision-makers after all, and the application of viceroy to humanity is but a mere joke to them: “Estragon: What exactly did we ask him for? / Vladimir: Were you not there? / Estragon: I can’t have been listening. / Vladimir: Oh . . . *Nothing very definite*” (18,

emphasis mine). Beckett's people are never certain, never certain of anything, never certain by whom they have been elected viceroys for instance, or who that never-appearing Godot is, what time they have met before (Have they met at all?), and what vision he has, whose impalpable vision, obscure and even unknown (or unknowable?), they picture in their minds in various ways: When Estragon tells Vladimir what they asked Godot for could be 'a kind of prayer' or 'a *vague* supplication', Godot takes the vision of a heavenly figure all at once. And the reply Godot would give would have to be thought over 'in the quiet of his home', consulting 'his family' and 'friends'. By now the heavenly figure has acquired the appearance of an earthly figure, a human being. Godot may have to consult 'his agents', which simply leads the audience to construe that he might be a dictator as well. Godot takes the vision of a capitalist, like Pozzo, when he has to consult 'his correspondents'. Or he may be a professor consulting 'his books' over the response. Finally, he becomes the director or manager in the eyes of Vladimir and Estragon, who would have to consult "his bank account before taking a decision" (18).

The reader may have by now noticed the lack of uncertainty which permeates the passage beginning with Vladimir's own remark, "Oh . . . Nothing very definite", playing havoc with his own certainty-oriented philosophy. This lack of definiteness is what Beckett has incorporated into his writing mainly through the word 'perhaps'. Moreover, within the definition of the mound under this entry, there is a reference to the cross which commonly surmounts the 'mound', as Estragon has mounted it. This sheds more light on why Estragon takes himself for Christ:

Vladimir: But you can't go barefoot!

Estragon: Christ did.

Vladimir: Christ! What has Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!

Estragon: All my life I've compared myself to him.

Vladimir: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!

Estragon: Yes. And they crucified quick. Silence. (52)

Thus, the status of the viceroy is not only pitiable, but lamentable as well. He is born crucified, lives a crucified life, and dies crucified. "Identification with Christ's crucifixion also figures before the uterine

climax of 'The End'. This whole area is compounded in Beckett's case by being not only a son of Mary but born on Good Friday" (Baker 71-72).

7. MOUND AS RUINS (OF CIVILIZATION)

*Ruins true refuge long last towards which so many false
time out of mind. All sides endlessness earth sky as one no
sound no stir. . . . Amidst his ruins . . . ruins of the refuge.
The End*

"Archaeol. An elevation produced upon a land surface by the natural burial of a ruined or abandoned city" (*Oxford*). This is still another definition of the mound. In fact, 'dissolution', 'stasis', 'refuge', 'ruins', etc. are what characterize the condition of the expelled figures, the tramps and the refugees in Beckett. "The sense of the refugee's being a sundered and discrete fragment from a primordial larger whole is suggested by 'first change of all a fragment comes away from mother ruin and with slow fall scarce stirs the dust' (*The End*, 180), compounded by the qualification of the crumbling ruin as 'mother ruin'" (92). The response Estragon gives to Vladimir's questioning him coldly as to "where His Highness spent the night?" is, "In a ditch. / Vladimir: (admiringly). A ditch! Where? / Estragon: (*without gesture*). Over there" (9). The stage direction, *admiringly*, shows how valuable a ditch would be for them. Moreover, the ditch is where Estragon spends nights, part of his life. 'An embankment' or 'a dam' are among the other meanings of mound. In some of the productions of this play, Estragon is sitting on an embankment bridging over a long ditch. That is, the mound (embankment) is over the ditch as is the mound (an elevation) "produced upon a land surface by the natural burial of a ruined or abandoned city." This analogy represents the ditch as standing for the ruins of civilization, where we are all living our lives in, and where everybody is proud of as its residence. "Vladimir: The same lot as usual? / Estragon: The same? I don't know" (9). What Estragon replies to Vladimir further clarifies the point that he may have been spending night after night in a ditch or many ditches, and for him everywhere is a kind of ditch after all: "Vladimir: And where were we yesterday evening according to you? / Estragon: How would I know? In another

compartment. There's no lack of void" (42).

The plight of Beckett's people is the plight of humanity. They are I's like pairs of blind EYEs groping incessantly to perceive the perceived, devouring the whole surrounding wilderness into the gorge of their own selves. The fallen supermen who are devoid of any will to life, turning into the unnamable I-Worms creeping along the dreary road, mobilizing stasis immobilized. Stuck in the encroaching void of being and immersing in the gyre of their existence, they constantly devise execution to end being, yet still are, the execution reprieved.

I would like to conclude this essay with a clarification of my intention to employ psychoanalysis as *part* of the interpretation of the topos of 'mound' which is, on that basis, further related to dust, dirt, mud, muck, etc., as in the case of the dirty blood-stained piece of cloth on Hamm's face, based on Weller's observation. According to Baker's *mythology* of psychoanalysis which later Shane Weller also attests, we are not dealing with a scrutiny of Beckett's personality or treating his corpus of writing as embodying psychoanalysis. Although Beckett believed himself to be an 'obsessional neurotic' (Weller 135), the therapies he underwent as well as the extensive reading he had on psychology and psychoanalysis, were attempts to cure and free himself of those 'mental' and 'physical' diseases. Even the process of writing, (as walking), was for Beckett a kind of 'self-therapy' as Anzieu argues (Anzieu in Weller 145). Last but not least, using Weller's terms, Beckett *stages* rather than *embodies* philosophical thoughts and psychological theories through the employment of certain *topoi*, objects, images, themes, mis-en-scenes, and mis-en-abyme.

Notes:

¹Both texts appear in full content in Mathew Feldman's *Sourcing Aporetics: An Empirical Study on Philosophical Influences in the Development of Samuel Beckett's Writing* (Oxford Brookes University, 2004).

²Shortly after the two pairs encounter Pozzo for the first time, Pozzo is reminded and begins his bitter mockery of the breed of humanity: "(halting). You are human beings none the less. (*He puts on his glasses.*) As far as one can see. (*he takes off his glasses.*) Of the same species as myself. (*He bursts into an enormous laugh.*) Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!" Or once when

Pozzo asks Estragon what his name is, he answers “Adam”, and when he calls Pozzo Cain and Abel, Pozzo responds to both, making Estragon conclude “he’s all humanity.” Thus speaks Vladimir by the end of the play, shedding more light upon their predicament as humanity, “But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us!”

³Cited in Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 199.

⁴The line appears in the 1963 C.R. Mueller tr. *Buchner’s Danton’s Death I.V*, in *Compl. Plays & Prose* 20.

⁵Member(s) of an ancient people that occupied lands in central Italy, to the northeast of Rome. By the 3rd-century B.C., after centuries of rivalry and fighting, the Romans had defeated them.

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