"Study That Tree": The Iconic Stage in *Purgatory* and *Waiting for Godot*

by Emily Atkins

William Butler Yeats's *Purgatory* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* open on similar, drastically pared-down landscapes, with the stylized image of a barren tree as one of the only things present to give the audience a sense of space or context. Both plays also evoke a spiritual wasteland wherein the characters enact their search for salvation. The influence of W. B. Yeats can be clearly seen in many of Beckett's works; however, an analysis of the way the tree functions at the symbolic level in each play reveals a radical difference in approach. Yeats is well known for his use of mystical, religious iconography in poems such as "The Two Trees," in which the dual images of the laden tree and the blasted tree stand for a complex set of spiritual ideas. Likewise, in *Purgatory*, the tree immediately conveys the characters' psychological condition to Yeats's audience. On the surface, the tree in *Waiting for Godot* appears to function in the same way, for the characters repeatedly look to it as a means of understanding the world they inhabit. Yet, throughout the course of the play, the image is gradually stripped of all symbolic meaning to become an object of contemplation rather than explanation. In his approach to imagery, Beckett was arguably influenced by his close friendship with Jack Yeats, whose highly subjective oil paintings captured Beckett's imagination. Thus, while there are striking similarities between many of W. B. Yeats's plays and Beckett's, the role of Jack Yeats's artistic philosophy in Beckett's move toward the Theatre of the Absurd warrants examination.

In the past few decades, many scholars have attempted to illuminate the esoteric, mythical system of belief that underlies W. B. Yeats's use of tree imagery. Sandra Gilbert, for example, discusses his 1892 poem "The Two Trees," and she connects its imagery to the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. She also draws a parallel between these symbols and William Blake's notion of innocence and experience (25). This kind of connection provides a general understanding of the iconic nature of Yeats's trees, but, as C. Nicholas Serra argues, it leaves "the specific details about the function of this meta-symbol to inference" (33). This is largely due to the fact that such knowledge is only for the initiated, which Yeats obviously was as a member of MacGregor Mathers's Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Serra 33). Despite the secret, occult nature of this society, Yeats freely used its iconography in his poetry without revealing the patterns and principles of its use. Dion Fortune, a respected Kabbalah authority, states that "From time to time the symbols of occult science have leaked out into popular knowledge, but the uninitiated have not understood the method of arranging these symbols in their pattern as the Tree" (138).

By this arrangement, Fortune is speaking of the Tree of Life in terms of a geometric pattern that details the path from corrupt matter to pure spirit. It consists of ten circles called the Sephiroth, each representing a manifestation of the divine on earth, which are connected by a series of straight lines. In his autobiography, Yeats explicitly mentions this

image, stating that "once men must have thought of it as like some great tree covered with its fruit and its foliage, but at some period … it had lost its natural form" (249). It became an abstraction, rather than literal representation of a tree. The icon serves a variety of occult purposes from meditation to transmutation, and its exact workings are hidden from the uninitiated (see Figure 1). Serra argues that this esoteric knowledge is the framework behind Yeats's use of tree symbolism, and that a basic familiarity with it is necessary to approach his work. He says that without such an understanding "we can recognize the individual symbols *as* esoteric, or occult … but we do not have the initiated knowledge that Yeats assumes which would otherwise allow us to see the larger pattern of symbols" (35). While Serra may be right, I would argue that all Yeats requires of his readers in order to access his poetic vision is a familiarity with the tree's ultimate function. What is most important in terms of his use of the tree as an icon in his work is that it represents a way for the soul to be "united with God while still in the body" (Harper 265).

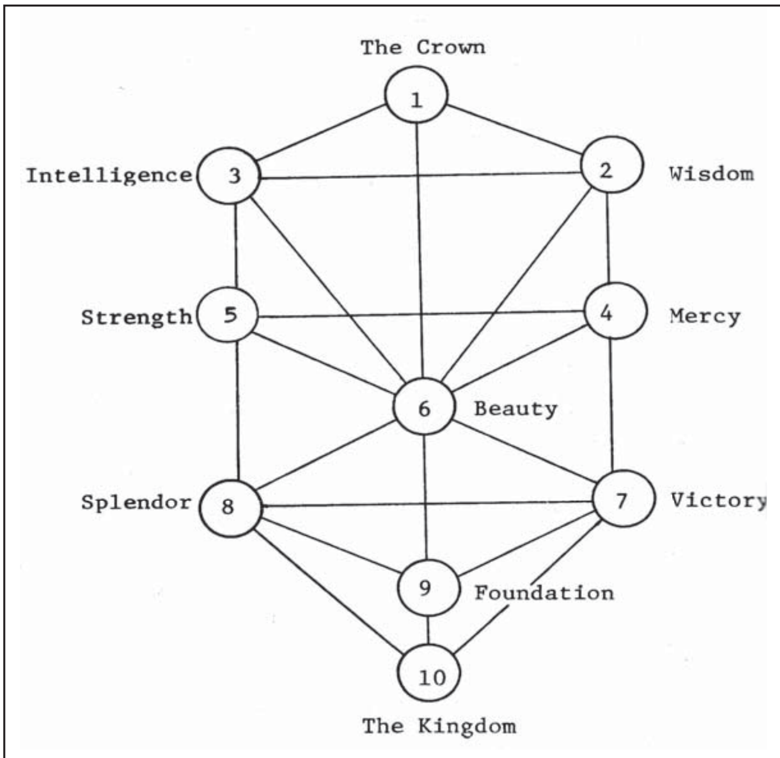

Figure 1. The Sephiroth. Courtesy of Wayne K. Chapman.

Thus, when Yeats invokes the Tree of Life in poems such as "The Two Trees," he is implying the ability to achieve in the present a kind of prelapsarian state of being. He uses the image of a tree in full bloom, laden with flowers and fruit, and he contrasts it with a barren tree, which represents the state of humanity's separation from God after the fall. In

the first stanza, the speaker tells his beloved to "gaze in thine own heart" to find the divine. He invokes the Kabbalistic tree when he says, "There the Loves a circle go, / The flaming circle of our days" (13-14). The circle is the site where the spirit experiences unity with God, "gyring, spiring to and fro / In those great ignorant leafy ways" (15-16). It is important to note here that the transcendent state is linked with ignorance, used in the sense of William Blake's concept of innocence. Union with God was the original state of the human spirit, before it was corrupted by knowledge. It is also the state to which hermetic saints aspire to return, following a mystic way as spiritually convoluted as the Sephiroth.

Similar aspirations are evident in much of Yeats's poetry, which contains multiple incarnations of occult iconography. Virginia Hyde discusses Rosicrucian symbolism in his rose poems, and argues that they "associate this flower with the 'world-soul' that enters matter from the spiritual realm and partakes of both" (70). His use of rose imagery is therefore linked to that of the Tree of Life in its concern for establishing a connection between humans and the divine. Nowhere is this link more obvious than in Althea Gyles's cover design for *The Secret Rose*, which features a thorny tree that clutches a human skeleton at its roots and blossoms into three roses at its crown.

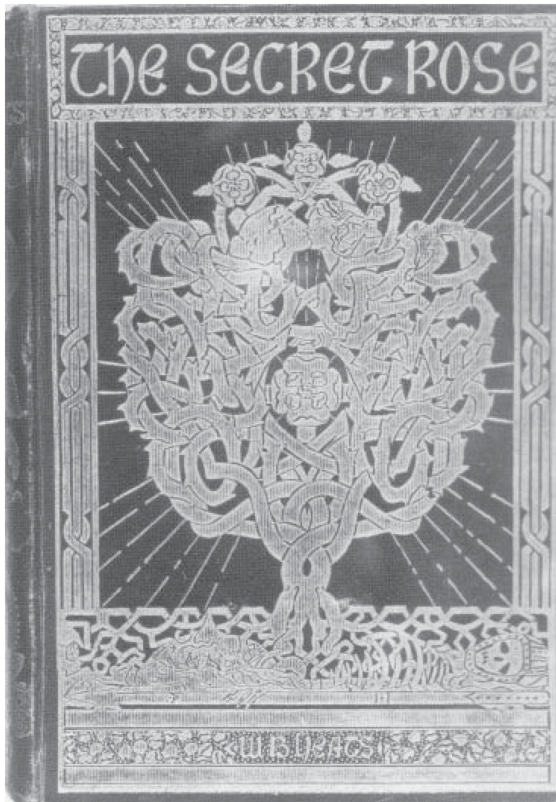

Figure 2. Front cover, *The Secret Rose* by W. B. Yeats (London, 1897), designed by Althea Gyles.

The image has its own roots in medieval iconography, where the skeleton represents the state of humanity after the fall and the roses symbolize Christ's promise of new life (Hynes 72). The rose also had special significance for Yeats, who used it as a symbol of Irish nationalism, allowing him to link ideas of spiritual purification with the growing home rule movement. Entwined in the tree's branches are two kissing lovers, whose elevation above the fallen man implies the possibility of transcending the state of corrupt matter in this life. The Gyles cover is worth mentioning in detail because of the ways in which it makes clear the relationship between verdant trees and spiritual possibility in Yeats's poetry.

In stark contrast to such lush imagery stands the dead tree, or the Qlippoth, which, in "The Two Trees," has "broken boughs and blackened leaves" (28). Insofar as a blooming tree in Yeatsian imagery implies union with the divine, a barren tree connotes its opposite: separation and the lack of that possibility. Yeats characterizes the knowledge that brings separation from God as false, gleaned from gazing "in the bitter glass / [that] demons, with their subtle guile, / lift up before us when they pass" (20-23). The tree does not impart true understanding, but rather "a fatal image" (25). In the biblical account, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is God's creation, forbidden to man because the real knowledge it imparts would make him more like God. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, "the Lord God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (Gen. 3.22). In Yeats's poem, however, "the glass of outer weariness / [was] made when God slept in times of old" (31-32). It cannot provide access to the eternal; it can only bring about the pain and suffering of separation from God. Like the "ravens of unresting thought; / flying, crying, to and fro, / cruel claw and hungry throat," which inhabit the tree, those who possess this false knowledge automatically exist in a kind of purgatorial space where they are eternally unsatisfied.

Knowing Yeats's use of this archetypal duality between the two trees provides an immediate understanding of the psychological and spiritual condition depicted in *Purgatory*. The scene is described simply as "A ruined house and a bare tree in the background." While the Old Man points to the ruined house as frequently as to the barren tree, they are dual facets of the same situation. In his book *W. B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality*, David Clark argues that Yeats's use of these two symbols in the play is as an expression of "an actual human soul in its essential activity of vision, reducing itself to thought" (92). Clark sets the tree and house up as direct representations of the mother's tragedy and the suffering that has become an inevitable result. He goes on to argue that the house and the tree parallel the play itself, for, like them, the play is stripped of all its "foliage," until nothing is left but the "desolate reality" of Yeats's vision.

While the tree and house are both destroyed, the Old Man remembers a time when they were alive. The house was at one time a place where "great people lived and died" (35), but his father burned it down. Likewise, the tree was not always barren; lightening blasted it. The Old Man says, "I saw it fifty years ago, before the thunderbolt had riven it, green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter" (33-34). The bolt of lightening, like the burning of the house, can therefore be seen as the traumatic moment when the characters were torn from the sight of God and placed in the purgatorial nightmare they are forced to relive. The Old Man repeatedly invokes the tree by way of explanation, although his

words are lost on his son. He says, “study that tree,” as if it holds the answer to everything that is wrong with their world.

The Old Man sees the ghosts of his parents re-enact the night of his conception, which he understands as the moment that ultimately led to the blasting of the tree. He tries to explain to his son why the ghosts reappear:

> The souls in Purgatory that come back
> To habitations and familiar spots …
> Re-live their transgressions, and that not once,
> But many times; they know at last
> The consequence of those transgressions ….
> There is no help but in themselves
> And in the mercy of God. (34)

Like the ravens in “The Two Trees,” his parents’ ghosts are never at peace and are forced to repeat their actions on earth until they are granted forgiveness by God or by the living. Similarly, the Old Man is also in a kind of living purgatory, as he not only witnesses his parents’ unrest, but also repeats his own sins. He murdered his father in revenge for his burning down the house, and as he watches his parents relive their transgressions he relives his own by killing his son. Mistakenly choosing a blood price for atonement, he believes that by killing his son he will set his mother’s spirit free. Immediately after he kills the boy, the tree is bathed in white light. He says, “Study that tree. It stands there like a purified soul, all cold, sweet, glistening light” (39). Yet as soon as he thinks he is ready to move on and start a new life, he hears hoof-beats, the sign of his father’s ghost approaching his mother’s door. At that moment he knows that he has not only failed to save his mother’s soul, but that he also has damned his own. He laments his fate, crying “Twice a murderer and all for nothing” (39). The play ends with his appeal to God to release her spirit, but not his own, as if he doesn’t understand that he too is trapped in a living hell. The illumination of the tree does not represent a release from purgatory, but rather draws the audience’s attention to the tree itself as evidence of its continued influence on the characters, both alive and dead.

Figure 3. Illustration by Victor Brown accompanying W. B. Yeats’s lyric “The Wicked Hawthorn Tree” in *A Broadside* No. 2 (New Series), Cuala Press, February, 1935. Set before the ruined Castle Dargan, the tree and lyric, first employed in the dance-play *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1935), pp. 11-13, anticipate the setting of *Purgatory*. Jack Yeats’s numerous illustrations for the Cuala series, which his brother edited, may well have been known to Beckett.

What is immediately apparent from reading the play is that the tree serves a function that goes beyond symbolism. It represents much more than the bleakness and suffering of the purgatorial state. Rather, it stands for a whole set of complicated spiritual beliefs that make up the entire meta-narrative of humanity's fall from grace and potential for redemption. In his book *Yeats's Iconography*, F. A. C. Wilson argues that Yeats relied on archetypal religious icons to communicate his meaning:

> [Yeats] believed in a collective unconscious which would operate to suggest his … meanings to all readers … [and] that any symbol which at some time or other in the world's history had been a part of religion would retain for ever … a peculiar depth and power of communication. (13)

The importance of Wilson's work lies in his ability to show how many of Yeats's works are framed by his understanding and use of religious icons. He did not simply co-opt an already existing symbol, but rather used its archetypal connotations to coin his own, blending and bending traditions as he saw fit to create an entire symbol-system that would then affect all of the words on the page (15). The point that is most relevant to my argument, however, is much simpler: Yeats used iconic symbols to convey a particular, if not explicit, meaning to his audience. While there may still be room for interpretation, an understanding of how he has used tree imagery in his other works certainly shapes what kind of meaning will be inferred from the play. It is his way of silently stepping into the play and telling his audience what to expect and why.

This is not to suggest that only certain initiated readers or members of the audience would be able to appreciate Yeats's play for what it is. As Katherine Worth argues in *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett*, his plays have different levels of meaning that make them accessible to anyone. But she also points to Yeats's use of symbolism as a way of communicating directly with his audience. She argues that he "assumed that symbols had the power to change our mode of thinking by luring us to the 'threshold of sleep' and evoking 'indefinable and yet precise emotions'" (158). Thus, even if the members of the audience are unfamiliar with his use of Kabbalistic iconography, they will nevertheless be affected by the image of the blasted tree because of its unconscious, archetypal connotations. In either case, Yeats uses symbols to frame his audience's understanding and to communicate with them on some level.

Having come to an understanding of Yeats's use of the blasted tree in *Purgatory* as a way to explain the characters' spiritual condition, it is fairly easy to see a direct connection with Samuel Beckett's tree in *Waiting for Godot*. Both plays evoke a similar psychological space in which the characters are unsatisfied in their search for salvation. One might use this as evidence of Yeats's dramatic influence on Beckett, for, as Worth argues, Beckett is "above all the heir of Yeats" (241). In an article entitled "Yeats, Beckett and the Force of Change," Worth makes explicit the parallel between their use of tree imagery. Referring to the withered tree in Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well*, she argues that it is "almost impossible for those familiar with *Waiting for Godot* not to be reminded of those other men in waiting … mysteriously compelled to meet by a tree" (141).

In terms of how the symbol functions in the plays, however, the playwrights have remarkably different approaches. In fact, in his essay "Symbols, Signs and Language,"

Gordon Armstrong argues that Beckett was more influenced by the visual art and writings of Jack Yeats than by the dramatic work of his older brother. He states that Beckett himself made this connection explicit during a conversation in the Café Francais in Paris:

> A: I would think that Yeats was very influential in your development as a playwright?
> B: You mean Jack Yeats?
> A: And not W. B. Yeats?
> B: No. He went after all the wrong things in Irish life. (39)[1]

Beckett's relationship with Jack Yeats has been well documented, both by scholars and by Beckett himself. He met Yeats in 1930 through Thomas MacGreevy, a poet, critic, and later director of the National Gallery of Ireland. MacGreevy describes Beckett's reaction to this meeting in a letter to Yeats, where he writes, "He was completely staggered by the pictures and though he has met many people through me he dismissed them all in his letter in the remark 'and to think I owe meeting Jack Yeats and Joyce to you!'"[2] The fact that Beckett equates meeting Jack Yeats with meeting Joyce, Beckett's mentor, reveals the extent of Beckett's admiration for the painter. Bruce Arnold discusses their relationship, which remained close throughout the remainder of Jack's life, as one that became "increasingly rich and mutually rewarding," and Arnold states that Jack's influence on Beckett "can be traced to his prose-writing, his understanding of theatre, and his views on art generally" (246).

Indeed, the qualities that Beckett most admired about Jack Yeats's paintings can be found in many of Beckett's works. In an article**,** "Until the Gag is Chewed," Dan Gunn explains that "the curiosity which stoked Beckett's knowledge of art always had one eye on the possibilities for his own art" (15). In order to understand the kind of artistic vision that engaged Beckett's imagination, it is helpful to look at some of his writings about the younger Yeats. In 1945, Beckett wrote a response to MacGreevy's claim that Jack Yeats was the greatest *Irish* painter that Ireland had ever produced. Beckett responded with criticism, stating that considerations of nationality had nothing to do with aesthetics, and he went on to illuminate what he thought to be important about Yeats's art:

> He is with the great of our time … because he brings light, as only the great dare to bring light, to the issueless predicament of existence, reduces the dark where there might have been, mathematically at least, a door … to a world where Tir-na-nOgue makes no more sense than Bachelor's Walk, nor Helen than the apple-woman, nor asses than men, nor Abel's blood than Useful's, nor morning than night, nor inward than the outward search. (74).

What he is getting at here is Yeats's refusal, particularly in his later paintings, to make the meanings of his images explicit, or to impose any fixed symbolic framework on his subject matter. In this sense, his art was fundamentally different from that of his older brother. In *Samuel Beckett, W. B. Yeats and Jack Yeats*, Armstrong explains that Beckett was interested in the way Jack stripped his images of symbolism because doing so left the imagination unfettered and engaged. In a poem entitled, "Homage to Jack B. Yeats,"

Beckett calls him the "supreme master who submits to what cannot be mastered, / and trembles" (76). In this line, meaning is the thing that cannot be mastered, and the embrace of subjectivity the greatest artistic response.

While Yeats's early art was more representational, he began to experiment in the early 1920's, abandoning line in favor of a thick impasto that he applied with knives or his fingers. While this shift in technique sparked criticism from some, who claimed that he didn't understand how to use oils, he didn't seem to care, and refused throughout his life to identify himself with any particular school or movement (Kermode 19). Others, however, were much more receptive to his later paintings, in which, as Raymond Mortimer explains, "gusto for the thing seen is drowned in gusto for the means of expression."[3] One clear example that further distinguishes Jack from W. B. in terms of symbolism involves a series of rose paintings done in 1936. I have already discussed W. B.'s use of the rose as a religious and political icon, but when Jack Yeats wrote of the project to Thomas Bodkin, he insisted that his rose had "nothing piano about it, nor yet fussy diegame."[4]

Indeed, Armstrong argues that Yeats's depiction of the rose was so subjective that it "departed from the canvas … [and] in effect, developed the dynamic evanescence of the stage in pictorial representation (203). This effect can be seen in *A Rose,* in particular, where the lack of any solid form to anchor the rose makes it appear to float toward the viewer without context. Background and foreground are all but indistinguishable, which collapses the space and equalizes all of the possible meanings surrounding the rose.

Figure 4. Jack B. Yeats, *A Rose* © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS), London.

If we trace Beckett's use of the tree image in *Waiting for Godot*, it is possible to see it in the same line of thought as Jack Yeats's rose, as moving from objectivity to subjectivity. The play opens on a scene much like that of *Purgatory*, with simply a tree and a road. Vladimir and Estragon are trapped in a kind of philosophical wasteland, and they are rooted to the site of the tree. It is the spot where they were told to meet Godot, and it

therefore represents their salvation in an oblique way. Yet their first reference to the tree immediately calls its symbolism into question. They argue about what kind of tree it is, why it has no leaves, and finally whether or not it is even a tree to begin with:

Estragon: Looks to me more like a bush.
Vladimir: A shrub.
Estragon: A bush.
Vladimir: A—. What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place? (8)

Not only do the characters question whether or not the tree represents the site of their salvation; they also question its very existence as a tree. This exchange strips the image of its ability to convey any kind of explanation to the characters or the audience. Although they continually come back to the tree in conversation, it gives them no answers. While they are waiting for Godot, they wonder how the tree can help them at least survive their boredom. Estragon suggests they hang themselves on it, which they both agree is a good plan, but Vladimir insists that the tree's boughs are not sturdy enough. He asks Estragon to go first, to test it out. In the end, neither one hangs himself, and they are left in exactly the same state of insufferable boredom, in which state Estragon exclaims, "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" (43).

In the second Act, the tree has miraculously sprouted a few leaves. Considering W. B. Yeats's depiction of the Tree of Life as leafy and the Tree of Knowledge as barren, it is tempting to interpret this change as an indication of the characters' impending salvation. This reading could be further enhanced by the characters' repeated proclamations of happiness:

Vladimir: Say, I am happy.
Estragon: I am happy.
Vladimir: So am I.
Estragon: So am I.
Vladimir: We are happy.
Estragon. We are happy. (*Silence*). What do we do, now that we are happy? (66)

Even their supposed happiness does them no good in terms of changing their situation in any way. They are still stuck waiting for Godot. When they realize this, they turn back to the tree. Vladimir points it out, saying, "The tree, look at the tree" (66). But Estragon doesn't remember it from the previous day and is not sure they are in the same place. When Vladimir asks him why he doesn't recognize the place, he replies with fury, "Recognize! What is there to recognize?" (67). The tree is obviously there, and he obviously sees it, so this exclamation must be interpreted as his understanding of the instability of meaning at its core. This undermines any hope that the tree is moving toward a symbol of possible redemption, despite its new leaves.

Such hopes are all but shattered in the repeated reference to the tree, when the characters both respond with opposing interpretations. Again, Vladimir asks Estragon to look at the tree, and he points out that "yesterday it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves" (73). He is amazed at the fact that the tree could have sprouted the leaves in a single night, and seems to take this as evidence of something miraculous. Estragon, on

the other hand, sees it differently: "I tell you we weren't here yesterday" (73). The same tree that might have represented hope to one character proves to the other that they are lost. By playing with the image in this way, Beckett removes its ability to convey a set answer or explanation to his characters or his audience. It is up to each person to determine for himself the tree's ultimate significance. For Vladimir and Estragon, it ultimately loses all meaning. After realizing that they cannot even effectively hide behind it, Vladimir says, "Decidedly this tree will not have been the slightest use to us" (84). This is the last time the characters mention the tree, except to parody it or think of hanging themselves from its branches again.

Beckett's ability to strip his images of any possible symbolism is indicative of his overall vision for the role of drama. Like Jack Yeats, he valued subjectivity and uncertainty over controlled meaning. In his book, *Beckett/Beckett*, Vivian Mercier discusses the philosophical implications of Beckett's work as evidence that he was attempting to represent an existential state of being. Mercier quotes the following excerpt from an interview Beckett gave in 1961 with Gabriel d'Aubarede of *Les Nouvelles Litteraires*:

> A: Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?
> B: I never read philosophers.
> A: Why not?
> B: I never understand anything they write.
> A. All the same, people have wondered if the existentialist's problem of Being may afford a key to your works.
> B: There's no key or problem. I wouldn't have had any reason to write my [plays] if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms.[5] (160)

Mercier says that this last statement was either a misunderstanding or a deliberate misrepresentation on the part of the interviewer, or it might have occurred as a result of Beckett's not being "in a forthcoming mood" (160). The latter is more likely the case, as Beckett was originally a student of philosophy and wrote a thesis on Pascal. There is clearly philosophical matter in all of his works, both dramatic and narrative, but, like Jack Yeats, Beckett keeps his intentions to himself. While *Waiting for Godot* might present the ideal form of the existential dilemma, as Mercier argues, this impression at least partially results from Beckett's refusal to impart any explicit, objective meaning in his plays. I do not suggest that there is no meaning in a Beckett play, but rather that he forces his audience to engage in their own struggle to make meaning for themselves, in whatever way makes the most sense for them. Thus, the play does not represent the existential dilemma so much as to enact it in its viewers.

Still, the play's subjectivity can be just as easily understood as a result of Beckett's artistic vision rather than his philosophic one. The former has a great deal to do with how he understood language to function in terms of creating meaning. While W. B. Yeats found words to be useful tools for conveying reality, Beckett was more concerned with their frailty. He was aware of the fact that language has the tendency to slip, break down, or deconstruct itself. Armstrong calls his work "'literature of the unword' whereby language is eroded until 'that which lurks behind it … begins to trickle through'" (44). Beckett's ideas about language and meaning may have owed as much to his friendship with Jack

Yeats as to his awareness of early French theories of deconstruction. Armstrong quotes an interview that Jack gave to Tom Driver, published in 1961, in which he explains his notion of the relationship between form and meaning in art:

> What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be a new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos, and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. (46)[6]

Beckett was able to achieve just such a form because he continually divested his images of symbolic meaning. In *Waiting for Godot* he focuses on the tree in a way that undermines all assumptions about its nature. H. Porter Abbot describes this technique as part of what he calls "narratricide" in his book *Beckett Writing Beckett*. He argues that Beckett "unwrites" his images in the "continual focusing and refocusing on a single object … [which] is cast into doubt … both by the derision of others and by the fact that it emerges … only as an image of an image" (10). The more Vladimir and Estragon mention the tree and try to understand its significance, the more such a notion becomes impossible, as they both doubt each other's perceptions. In the end, the audience is left with the form of a tree but no content.

Figure 5. Courtesy of The People's Branch Theatre. Jenny Littleton (Estragon) and Mary Bailey (Vladimir) in a production of *Waiting for Godot* in 2002. Note tree at left.

W. B. Yeats is considered by most to be the father of Modern Irish drama, and in many ways Beckett's debt to him is considerable. *Waiting for Godot* owes much of its stage design, its imagery, and its basic dramatic situation to Yeats. At first glance, Beckett's tree seems to take on iconic status, as both the characters and the audience are immediately drawn to its mysterious presence as if it might be a source of some hidden knowledge that will provide an answer to the fundamental question of being that the play asks. Below the surface, however, the parallels begin to break down, as Beckett departs radically from Yeats's reliance on a symbolic over-system. He strips his icons of their master narratives,

in a move that (in keeping with the conventions of Beckett scholarship) might best be described as *iconicide*. The influence of Jack Yeats on this aspect of Beckett's art, in particular, simply cannot be ignored. By the time these two men met and became friends, Jack had already been experimenting with subjective imagery for quite some time when Beckett was just beginning his literary career. Beckett's unfaltering admiration for the painter is well known; he became his greatest advocate throughout his life. Thus, while both Yeats brothers influenced him a great deal, Jack Yeats's paintings seem to have suggested a way for Beckett to create a new kind of drama in the enormous literary shadow of W. B. Yeats.

Notes

1. Samuel Beckett, conversation with Gordon Armstrong, Paris, November 1980.
2. 22 December 1930.
3. Quoted in Donoghue, 33.
4. Jack to Thomas Bodkin, 31 August 1936.
5. Gabriel d'Aubarede, "Waiting for Beckett," *Trace* 42 (1961): 157. Trans. Christopher Waters from the original French in *Nouvelles Litteraires*. 16 February 1961.
6. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeline," *Columbia University Forum* 4.3 (1961): 21-55.

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