spectively and to move beyond the restricting rules that govern the communities they were born into.

3. Yeats, Joyce and Beckett: Towards a New Self-Conception

Contrary to writers such as Synge or O’Casey, William Butler Yeats’ objective at the beginning of his career was not primarily to offer a realistic and authentic account of Irish life. He aimed at restoring elements of the Old Gaelic order and at reviving Ireland’s “disregarded past or a set of disinherit ed values” in order to embed the cultural heritage in the present and, in a second step, to transform the country’s future (Webb xxxiii). In an article on national drama, Yeats explained what he believed to be the function of space, legends and folklore in Ireland’s cultural heritage:

Our legends are always associated with places, and not merely every mountain and valley, but every strange stone and little coppice has its legend, preserved in written or unwritten tradition. Our Irish romantic movement has arisen out of this tradition, and should always, even when it makes new legends about traditional people and things, be haunted by places. It should make Ireland, as Ireland and all other lands were in ancient times, a holy land to her own people. (“Literary Ideals in Ireland” 958)

Place, in this broad definition of the word, plays a predominant role in Yeats’ poetry. Despising early modern(ist) England and everything that it stood for, Yeats turned towards the place of his own childhood, the Sligo landscapes, to rediscover its rich but nearly forgotten culture, and he transformed it into a dream-like paradise:

Yeats associated England with everything he loathed about the modern world: with imperialism, with vulgar, godless materialism, with urban ugliness and squalor. Ireland, by contrast, appeared an unspoiled, beautiful place where people lived according to old-age traditions and held on to magical, time-honored beliefs. Ireland’s remote western regions held special importance, not only because of Yeats’s ties to Sligo but also because of the west’s comparative isolation from the British influences that had more powerfully affected the populous and accessible east. Although the west had been ravaged by the famines of the 1840s (and thus marked by the catastrophic effects of British neglect), many of its people still spoke Irish, and many more preserved distinctively Irish stories and values. By his early twenties Yeats was searching for the answers to his spiritual and political questions in the folk beliefs of Ireland’s western country people and in the heroic myths of the whole island’s ancient Gaelic culture. These traditions, he felt, preserved satisfying ways of life and eternal spiritual truths that had been forgotten in modernized places like England and that were threatened, even in Ireland, by the encroachment of British culture. (Holdeman 6–7)
In other words, hundreds of years after the Irish had been deprived of their land and – as Fear Dorcha Ó Mealláin recounted in his poem “Exodus to Connacht” – had been forced to leave their home to resettle in Connacht as a punishment, Yeats identified precisely this part of Ireland as the most traditional and authentic. He did not believe that true Irishness was experienced directly in this area, but that a representation of the Irish before the British influence could be observed, recaptured and eventually turned into public knowledge once more. For him, the Sligo landscapes bore the potential of reviving Irish culture and allowing people to come into contact “with an idea or a sometimes vague impression of what Ireland ought to be in order to meet certain undefined but intuitively sensed spiritual needs” (McKenna 421).23

McKenna further argued that the writers of the Literary Revival created an imaginative, bucolic retreat populated by figures of rather unreal romance and myth who had a strong and direct connection not only with the mythic past, not only with a fecund and mysterious landscape alive with preternatural possibilities, but with the deep meaning and purposefulness endemic to that past and to those landscapes, a meaning and purposefulness that eluded the industrial societies of the mid-to-late eighteenth century. (421)

In “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” Yeats combines romantic and modernist elements and images, but he clearly favours the romantic notion. In an urban environment surrounded by “pavements grey” (W. B. Yeats: The Poems 60, l.11), typical of modernist texts, the poet yearns for his past in Innisfree, constantly hearing the dropping water “in the deep heart’s core” (l.12).24 Dreaming of

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23 The Irish Literary Revival is “a term used to describe the modern Irish literary movement, lasting from around 1890 [...] to about 1922, a date marking the end of the Anglo-Irish War and the publication of Ulysses” (“Literary Revival” 311). In the early 1890s, William Butler Yeats hoped to replace the political movement in Ireland centring round a land reform by a cultural one, reviving Irish legend and folklore. Douglas Hyde, another key figure of this movement, “restated Thomas Davis’s notion that there was an indissoluble link between a nation’s language and its culture, and argued for the preservation and revival of the Irish language and Irish customs, claiming that it was a sign of cultural weakness to mimic English ways and habits of thoughts” (312). Consequently, Gaelic mythological figures played a major role in their writings; in fact, the heroic figure, Cú Chulainn, became “the dominant fictional figure of the revival” and was seen as “the embodiment of the heroic nationalism” (313). The renewed interest in Gaelic literature, language and culture, by people such as William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, James O’Grady, Douglas Hyde, and George Moore, also led to the foundation of the Abbey Theatre. However, politics and culture cannot easily be kept apart during the Irish Literary Revival. After the Easter Rising in 1916, for instance, Yeats wondered “‘Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?’, referring to Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902), a play which had Maud Gonne in the title-role, embodying nationalist intensity” (313).

24 In her “Introduction” to The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats, Howes claims that Yeats, who was “[b]orn in 1865, [...] produced works that arguably belong to each of three major
peace, tranquillity and simplicity in this Arcadian landscape, which now only exists in his mind, the poet finally exclaims, in stanza one and three, “I will arise now and go” (l.1 and 9) to settle in “a small cabin” (l.2) and live on honey and beans (l.3). Yeats thus shifted his notion of how (Irish) society should ideally be ruled into places like Innisfree or the Gaelic utopian land of the forever young, Tír na nÓg. While Synge moved the periphery from the Irish mainland to the Aran Islands so that the Irish mainland served as the new centre, Yeats announced the death of the colonial system. England stopped being the sole focus of the Irish. In Yeats’ texts, the colonised were undergoing a process of emancipation and they were speaking for themselves. 

Although Oisín, the hero of Yeats’ first longer poem, “The Wanderings of Oisín,” lives in the utopian land of Tír na nÓg for over 300 years and spends these three centuries dancing, feasting and fighting a demon together with his wife, the fairy princess Niamh, he still considers Ireland his true home. Despite the gaiety on the island, in his dreams, he is constantly reminded of the Irish past and he finally admits his longing for the Fenians, his mortal Irish friends:

But in dreams, mild man of the croziers, driving the dust with their throngs, 
Moved round me, of seamen or landsmen, all who are winter tales; 
Came by me the kings of the Red Branch, with roaring of laughter and songs, 
Or moved as they moved once, love-making or piercing the tempest with sails. 
[...] 
And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved in long streams, 
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her needle of bone. 
So I lived and lived not, so wrought I and wrought not, with creatures of dreams. 
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb as a stone. 

(W.B. Yeats: The Poems 24–25, 1.85–88 and 1.93–96)

As a remedy to his depression, Oisín begs Niamh to allow him to revisit his former home. Tragically, the journey home is a journey towards his own death. Having promised Niamh not to touch Irish soil, he falls from his horse as he tries to help two people who are carrying a sack full of sand (26, l.125 – 128, and 30, l.185 –192). Dying, he begs Saint Patrick, to whom he has confessed the story of his life in the poem, for help in reuniting with the Fenians and reviving their forgotten deeds and songs:

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Put the staff in my hands; for I go to the Fenians, O cleric, to chaunt
The war-songs that roused them of old; they will rise, making clouds with their
breath,
Innumerable, singing, exultant; the clay underneath them shall pant,
And demons be broken in pieces, and trampled beneath them in death.

We will tear out the flaming stones, and batter the gateway of brass
And enter, and none sayeth ‘No’ when there enters the strongly armed guest;
Make clean as broom cleans, and march on as oxen move over young grass;
Then feast, making converse of wars, and of old wounds, and turn to our rest.

It were sad to gaze on the blessèd and no man I loved of old there;
I throw down the chain of small stones! when life in my body has ceased,
I will go to Caoilte, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan, Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast.

(31, l.201–204 and l. 209–212, and 32, l.221–224)

Similarly to the hero of his poem, Yeats urged a national revival of the old
myths and legends to transform this knowledge of the country, which was kept
privately by a few, into something new and powerful for the public. In a period,
“[a]fter the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891, when he and others
dreamed unrealistically of a radical transfer of nationalist energies from the
political to cultural spheres, Yeats hoped to fill an apparent political vacuum
with cultural work” (Allison 185).25 He craved for a cultural ‘remembrance of
Ireland’s future’ and hoped to mentally free the country from English
colonisation. Having been fascinated by Irish myths from an early age, Yeats
had begun to collect these narratives when he was in his teens. He later
published numerous Irish legends and fairy tales perceiving these texts as a
very distinct trait of the Irish character. Moreover, Pethica notes that these
narratives and tales answered his deep interest in the occult and spiritual world:

Folklore and legend offered him subject matter that contrasted sharply with the
orthodoxies and concerns of the contemporary urban world, but that he was able to
claim as distinctively Irish and draw on in creating master-myths of Irish nationality.
As a storehouse of uncanny phenomena, ancient wisdom expressed in metaphorical or
allegorical forms, and traditional models of story-telling, folklore appealed to him on
occult, philosophical, and literary grounds. Heroic legend likewise attracted him both

25 Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891) became the Irish national leader in 1879 and was
elected as the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1880 (“Parnell” 465). He is generally
thought to have come closest to a peaceful transition of English power towards a self-
governed Irish state, the so-called ‘Home Rule.’ However, his “political career was destroyed
by the party split that followed his citation as co-respondent in the O’Shea divorce petition of
December 1889, and his failure to defend the action” (465–466). He married Katherine
O’Shea in June 1891 and died the following October, having failed to complete his political
ambitions and hopes (466).
emotionally and intellectually, since he believed that only heroic action allowed the full expression of selfhood, and thus made possible the kind of passionate, heroic poetry he aspired to write. (129)

In 1898, Yeats’ interpretation of the past and his concentration on Irish legends and fairy stories resulted in an extended controversy in the Dublin *Daily Express* with John Eglinton, a “literary controversialist” who worked at the National Library of Ireland between 1895 and 1921 (“Eglinton” 169). Eglinton disapproved of Yeats’ literary efforts suggesting that the subject matters chosen by Yeats and other members of the Literary Revival “obstinate refusal to be taken up out of their old environment and be transplanted into the world of modern sympathies. The proper mode of treating them is a secret lost with the subjects themselves” (“What Should Be the Subjects” 957). Of course, Yeats strongly disagreed with Eglinton’s conservative – and from a postmodern standpoint, petty – view. He offered various examples from other European literatures, such as Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* or Wagner’s works, which had been adapted and reintegrated into modern literature. Nevertheless, the question whether – and if so how – old Irish legends and wisdom could be translated into the present and the future of the Irish public as well as into a more intricate, international experience was highly relevant. Thus, according to Crotty,

> [t]he writing of the period as a whole is characterised by a dialectic between idealisation of rural Ireland or of the national past, on the one hand, and aspiration towards a more complex, internationally alert and critical apprehension of Irish experience, on the other. (52)

At the beginning of Yeats’ career, his immense efforts to revive the Irish cultural heritage were sharply contrasted by his avoidance of national politics. He is a typical representative of those Irish people who, as Kiberd highlights, “can only bear the thought of violence if it is committed elsewhere” or happened in the past (“Irish Literature” 290, original emphasis). However, in the aftermath of the events surrounding the Easter Rising in 1916, Yeats felt compelled to reconsider this stance. He was shocked by the outcome of the events, which he had objected to when they first occurred. Suddenly, politics and literature, and accordingly public and private issues, started to be mingled in his writing. While the first part of the poem “Easter 1916” encapsulates Yeats’ personal experience and thoughts of the incidents as well as his relationship with the leaders of the Easter Rising, a public evaluation and meditation of these events is evoked in the second part (*Yeats’s Poems* 287 – 289).

Even at a time of great political insecurity, Yeats’ rendering of political events is more often than not merged, or in Freudian terms *condensed*, with
ancient traditions, beliefs and mythologies. In his poem “The Second Coming,” Yeats emphasises the fact that people have lost faith in the old order and have for this reason abolished it; the former centre has been eliminated. In spite of freeing themselves from earlier powers or influences, people, nonetheless, failed to establish a space of security, safety and happiness. The postcolonial world is thus primarily marked by the loss of innocence and the lack of order:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (W.B. Yeats: The Poems 235, l.1–4)

Emphasising the great void left behind as a result of the collapse of the colonial system, Yeats tried to fill this emptiness by withdrawing into symbolism in his later years. He repeatedly used the image of the tower and turned to ancient civilisations such as Byzantium for direction. The mystical element in his poetry, however, remained a dominant aspect throughout his career and kept playing a pivotal role in defining the characters’ identity.

Yeats’ shift in focus to Ireland exclusively foreshadows the ideas and the self-conscious positioning of James Joyce. Whereas many of the texts produced by Joyce’s Anglo-Irish predecessors were addressed to England to define Ireland from within and to oppose colonial power, England only plays a minor role in Joyce’s universe. His works Dubliners (1914), A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) and Ulysses (1922) are all set in the Irish capital and revolve around the lives and chores of Dublin characters in the years after Parnell’s death in 1891 and before the Irish Declaration of Independence in 1922. Joyce, therefore, chose a setting when Dublin still belonged to the British Empire and when the influence of the Roman Catholic Church exceeded the religious field and considerably shaped the social and political life of the Irish population (Bulson 33). Joyce, himself, however, was rather critical of the colonial and the religious powers governing the country and he “blamed these two forces for Dublin’s backwardness and inferiority” (33).

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26 Laplanche and Pontalis define condensation, as it is used by Sigmund Freud in Interpretation of Dreams, as a mechanism which can be applied in various ways: “[S]ometimes one element (theme, person, etc.) is alone preserved because it occurs several times in different dream-thoughts (‘nodal point’); alternatively, various elements may be combined into a disparate unity (as in the case of a composite figure); or again, the condensation of several images may result in the blurring of those traits which do not coincide so as to maintain and reinforce only those which are common” (83). Yeats uses the mechanism of condensation, for example, when he mixes ancient (Gaelic) thoughts with his personal experiences or with the contemporary Irish situation.
Watson argues that Joyce did not criticise the Roman Catholic Church primarily for its religious standpoints but “for what he designates as its social and historical role in Ireland” (Irish Identity 154). In his lecture “Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages,” which he gave at the University of Trieste in 1907, Joyce questions the strong effort of the Irish people to bring about political change while completely accepting the authority of the church: “I confess that I do not see what good it does to fulminate against English tyranny while the tyranny of Rome still holds the dwelling place of the soul” (125). In Joyce’s works, then, both the British Empire and the Roman Catholic Church are repeatedly presented as an “imperial power” and as a “mighty source for the inculcation of servility” from which the Irish desperately needed to free themselves (Watson, Irish Identity 154).

The novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man serves as an example of a character’s liberation from the main political and religious powers at work in Ireland and from various constraints present in Dublin society as a result of the strong influence that these forces obtained at the time. The text exclusively centres round Stephen Dedalus’ personal development from his early childhood to adolescence. At the beginning of the novel, Stephen, still a young boy, is allowed to dine with the older generation for the first time. He witnesses how the atmosphere of this festive event is spoilt by the fierce dispute of the adults over Parnell’s fall. On the one hand, Stephen’s father, Simon Dedalus, and Mr Casey, a fervent believer in nationalism, hold the Catholic Church in Ireland responsible for the final downfall of their “king” Parnell (A Portrait 41). Mr Casey strongly disagrees with the priests’ intervening in political matters claiming that “[w]e go to the house of God […] in all humility to pray to our Maker and not to hear election addresses” (32). On the other hand, Dante, a devout Catholic and blind follower of the Irish priests, defends the position of the religious leaders by saying: “It is a question of public morality. A priest would not be a priest if he did not tell his flock what is right and what is wrong” (32). For the Roman Catholic Church and consequently for herself, Parnell was “a public sinner” who “was no longer worthy to lead” (33). The argument between Dante and Mr Casey finally culminates in Mr Casey’s damnation of the Church and in their radically different conclusions from what has been said:

- The bishops and priests of Ireland have spoken, said Dante, and they must be obeyed.
- Let them leave politics alone, said Mr Casey, or the people may leave their church alone. (33)

Mr Casey’s point of view suggests that the priests’ behaviour might cause people to deny the Church any influence on their lives in the long run. This
standpoint foreshadows Stephen’s own position towards the end of the novel. During his early adolescence, Stephen experiences the enormous pressure issued by the Roman Catholic Church with regard to moral and social expectations signalled by a strict definition of mortal sins and eternal damnation. These demands, expressed in their absoluteness, cause Stephen to suffer immensely. He desperately tries to meet the standards set by the Roman Catholic Church and to fulfil the duties of a pious Catholic. When asked by the director of the college whether he has ever felt he had a vocation, Stephen briefly considers joining the order before he realises that he has to abandon this thought:

His destiny was to be elusive of social and religious orders. The wisdom of the priest’s appeal did not touch him to the quick. He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world. (165)

Stephen ends up disillusioned with the traditional powers at work in his country, severely doubting the traditional Irish understanding of concepts such as family, nation or religion. These reservations are encapsulated in the passage where Stephen expresses his definite ‘non serviam.’ Discussing his ambitions in life with his friend Cranly, he firmly declares: “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church” (251).

Similar to Stephen Dedalus, Joyce himself believed that an act of “self-reflection was required” and that a change in the mind-set of the Irish had to precede any political or cultural action (Bulson 33). Identifying and criticising the attitude of subservience and submissiveness as a key deficiency of the Irish in their struggle for political and cultural independence, Joyce dedicated much of his energy to portraying the city, the inhabitants’ lifestyles and culture in order to draw attention to the emptiness of the above-mentioned concepts in his homeland. Consequently, Joyce focused on Dublin and the behaviour of its inhabitants to illustrate how deeply rooted the “cultural inferiority” was in “the Irishman’s heritage” (Watson, Irish Identity 153). Furthermore, Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man indicate that those who encouraged the population to adhere to these ideals – namely the political and religious leaders – were primarily interested in preserving their own predominant and powerful position within Irish society. In order to illustrate how trapped and constrained by their own set of beliefs Joyce thought the Irish people really were, Joyce’s texts allow the readers to familiarise themselves with the protagonists’ thoughts and to become aware of their inner experiences, dreams and attitudes. In this context, Joyce wrote to Grant Richards, the eventual publisher of his short story collection, “I seriously believe that you
will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having a good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass” (as quoted by Ellmann 90). Joyce’s *Dubliners* captures the paralysis in Dublin to trigger people’s self-reflection: “My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because this city seemed to me the centre of paralysis” (as quoted by Ellmann 83). As a consequence, the plots of his short stories are not spectacular. *Dubliners* meticulously renders the characters’ lives by inviting the reader to follow the characters as they walk through the city, to accompany the protagonists on bus or tram rides or to participate in their daily work and pub visits in order to expose the reader to the uneventful life of Dublin society at the time portrayed.

Wirth-Nesher has correctly noted that “[i]n Joyce’s city most of the scenes take place in public spaces. Even if the characters are depicted at home, the central scene of the story will tend to be located in a public setting” (161). In her excellent chapter “Estranged Cities: Defamiliarizing Home,” which examines how Dublin is used as a setting by James Joyce, Wirth-Nesher offers a careful interpretation of public and private space:

> The effect of the predominance of public space is an emphasis on the Dubliner as a man or woman lacking a personal environment, a person composed of public roles. Dominant by its absence is any depiction of ‘home’ in the conventional bourgeois sense of the term. The stories of childhood offer no scenes of the nuclear family, with aunts and uncles conspicuously substituting for parents. Every home that we see is cheerless, bereft of hearth, stifling or violent. The unmarried Dubliners, whether young or old, are not single by choice but by default or deficiency of character. [...] With little comfort at home and less at work [...]. (162)

In spite of being a European capital at the beginning of the twentieth century, Dublin is not presented as a true metropolis but rather as a provincial town. The city is populated with characters who often seem to know each other – if only through some common acquaintance of theirs. They frequently stop in the streets to chat with one another or they pass people whom they know. Provincialism, in Wirth-Nesher’s opinion, therefore, becomes one of the more prominent features in defining the Irish capital:

> Joyce’s Dublin is characterized not by plenitude but by paucity. Dublin’s dwellers, as depicted in Joyce’s fiction, are not outsiders by virtue of social class, race, immigration, tourism, or politics. They are outsiders by virtue of being Dubliners. [...] They yearn for a metropolis despite their living in one. The stories are laced with the names of other cities – Paris, Berlin, London, Melbourne, Buenos Aires, Milan – inaccessible places for the Dubliners who find their own city all too accessible. (159)

Although most of the figures are well embedded in Dublin and although the public space is more a space of familiarity than of anonymity, the characters
appear to be discontent with the city’s accessibility. In Joyce, the terms accessibility and familiarity are negatively connoted and come to represent – to use Joyce’s own expression – “hemiplegia” in Dublin both with regard to space and relations (as quoted by Gilbert 55).

In fact, the theme of paralysis in Dubliners is experimented with in different contexts: the term is used to denote “the inability of physical movement, but it is also a spiritual, social, cultural, political and historical malaise” (Bulson 36). In the first short story of the collection, “The Sisters,” the word ‘paralysis,’ mentioned in the first paragraph, labels the medical condition which the priest suffers from as a result of his three strokes. The main character, a young first-person narrator, is puzzled by the strange sound of the word and he admits: “It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work” (Dubliners 7). Remarkably, then, ‘paralysis’ in this short story basically denotes the priest’s transitory state between life and death. In most of the later short stories in this collection, this metaphor of paralysis implying death is not spelt out explicitly but is implied by people being or feeling stuck in their hometown and their relationships.

Little Chandler in the short story “A Little Cloud” is a good example of a figure who feels imprisoned in his existence. The protagonist contemplates his own private and professional life, while he anticipates his old friend Gallaher’s visit to Dublin, who “[e]ight years before he had seen […] off at the North Wall” and who had meanwhile “become a brilliant figure on the London Press” (76). The prospect of meeting this well-respected man, whom he deeply admires, evokes a sudden feeling of pre-eminence in Chandler: “For the first time in his life he felt himself superior to the people he passed. For the first time his soul revolted against the dull inelegance of Capel Street. There was no doubt about it: if you wanted to succeed you had to go away. You could do nothing in Dublin” (79). This epiphany convinces him that to succeed in life, paralysed Dublin must be left behind.27 Feeling restricted by the atmosphere of the Irish capital, he believes a true metropolis like London would offer him the opportunity to express himself as a writer: “He was not sure what idea he wished to express but the thought that a poetic moment had touched him took life within him like an infant hope” (79). When he finally meets up with his old friend, he is too impressed by Gallaher’s knowledge of European capitals like

27 According to Holman and Harmon in A Handbook to Literature, “epiphany was given currency as a critical term by James Joyce, who used it to designate an event in which the essential nature of something – a person, a situation, an object – was suddenly perceived. It is thus an intuitive grasp of reality achieved in a quick flash of recognition in which something, usually simple and commonplace, is seen in a new light, and as Joyce says, ‘its soul, its whatness leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance’” (“Epiphany” 174).
Paris and London to recognise the negative undertone in his friend’s utterances when describing life in the printing business in London:

It pulls you down, he said, Press life. Always hurry and scurry, looking for copy and sometimes not finding it; and then, always to have something new in your stuff. Damn proofs and printers, I say, for a few days. I’m deuced glad, I can tell you, to get back to the old country. Does a fellow good, a bit of a holiday. I feel a ton better since I landed in dear dirty Dublin…. (81–82)

Later in the evening, while Little Chandler is minding his baby boy “[a] dull resentment against his own life awoke within him” (91). Reckoning that he – a husband and father – has missed the chance to escape from the monotony and constrictions of Dublin life, he regards himself as “a prisoner for life” (93). Losing control over his emotions, he shouts at his little son, whom he has rocked to and fro for a while to stop him from crying. The boy’s startled screaming causes Chandler’s wife to intervene, which only distances the young man further from his family. This scene finally intensifies the impression that neither his professional nor his private life in Dublin bears much potential for fulfilment.

In the short story “Eveline,” the eponymous female protagonist is first encountered by the reader as she is brooding over a similar dilemma to Chandler’s: she has been asked to follow her lover Frank to Buenos Aires and leave behind her dreary and depressing life in Dublin. In the first scene, the young woman is sitting “at the window watching the evening invade the avenue” (37). The window symbolises the threshold between her home and the outside world. A variation of this image is offered at a later stage of this text when Eveline is standing at the iron gates at the harbour which separate her old and all too familiar life from “her new home, in a distant unknown country” (38). Both images nicely illustrate her inner conflict: she is torn between the desire for fulfilment and her duties towards her family. Eveline has to opt for either home and the past or the unknown world and the future. If she chooses her home and the past, she will have to stay in the restricting Irish capital and play her role as a dutiful daughter by looking after her father and her younger siblings as she had promised before her mother passed away. Pursuing the option of freedom and a new life, however, will mean leaving Dublin, embarking on a ship with Frank and beginning a life of uncertainty. Pondering over this step, Eveline believes that this move would offer her the opportunity to escape domestic violence, home and “all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years, wondering where on earth all the dust came from” (37–38). In the Hill household, dust has obviously come to hide the existing silence, the profound lack of communication and homeliness. Thus, leaving her home, Eveline would no longer have to wonder about “the
name of the priest whose yellowing photograph hung on the wall above the broken harmonium” (38). Instead, her marital status would change and she imagines that due to this “[p]eople would treat her with respect then” (38). However, the reader not only shares her fantasies in which she imagines what her future life with Frank will be like, but also her memories where she recalls the happiness of her childhood. Carefully balancing the pros and cons, she feels that “now that she was about to leave [her present life] she did not find it a wholly undesirable life” (39). Thinking about Frank, she consents: “First of all it had been an excitement for her to have a fellow and then she had begun to like him” (40). Later on, standing beside Frank at the barrier and clutching the railing at the harbour “[a]ll the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her” (42). Eveline’s immobility is sharply contrasted by Frank rushing beyond the barrier and the *tempus fugit* element as the “boat blew a long mournful whistle into the mist” (42). Her state of paralysis even exceeds the ending of the short story: “He was shouted at to go on but still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (43). Portraying Eveline as “passive, like a helpless animal,” the narrator once more hints at the far-reaching consequences hemiplegia has on Dublin’s inhabitants (43). Standing entranced at the railings and deprived of any human will, Eveline is entirely trapped and can neither start a new life with Frank nor return to her old home.

Whereas Eveline’s indecision adds to her unhappy situation, Irish society and the pressure that it puts on individuals is blamed in “The Dead.” As in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the annual dinner and dance at Kate, Julia and Mary Jane Morkan’s around Christmas-time is yet another instance where a festive event is nearly ruined by guests whose views on politics and culture differ widely. Gabriel Conroy, Kate and Julia’s nephew, represents the open-minded and modern Irishman. The tension between the traditionalists and the modern representatives is reinforced by Gabriel’s argument with Miss Ivors, a passionate nationalist and firm believer in the Irish language and culture. Like Synge and Yeats, Miss Ivors orients herself by looking towards the west of Ireland and the Gaelic past rather than towards Europe. She even invites Gabriel to join herself and her friends on “an excursion to the Aran Isles” to spend the summer visiting his own country (215). Gabriel’s evading answer, “[w]ell, we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany […] partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change,” prompts her to make a condescending comment about his – supposed – lack of knowledge about Irish geography, the country’s population and its culture (215). These accusations do not fail to have their desired effect. Provoked by her statements, Gabriel loses his countenance and exclaims: “O, to tell you the truth, […] I’m
sick of my own country, sick of it” (216). When he explains to his wife what the row was all about, Gretta becomes quite enthusiastic about the prospect of going west:

His wife clasped her hands excitedly and gave a little jump.
– O, do go, Gabriel, she cried. I’d love to see Galway again.
– You can go if you like, said Gabriel coldly. (218)

This exchange between the couple underlines what an outsider Gabriel, whose thoughts resemble those of Little Chandler and Stephen Dedalus, is at the dance. When asked to give a speech before dinner, he once more attempts to persuade the others of his own convictions: “A new generation is growing up in our midst, a generation actuated by new ideas and new principles. It is serious and enthusiastic for these new ideas and its enthusiasm, even when it is misdirected, is, I believe, in the main sincere” (232). Although Gabriel acknowledges the good old times in Ireland later in his speech, this attitude reveals much of James Joyce’s own standpoint. Unlike Yeats, who had drawn his inspiration from ancient Irish legends and myths from the west of Ireland, Joyce’s interest was much more urban and he did not share Yeats’ belief that the country could be advanced by reviving its Gaelic heritage.

Instead of concentrating on Ireland’s old myths and legends, Joyce cast his eye on ancient Greek civilisation in Ulysses by echoing the protagonist’s wanderings described in Homer’s Odyssey. Moreover, he extensively experimented with the possibilities which art offered to transcend hemiplegia. Watson rightly states that “[f]or Joyce, then, the sense of freedom and even liberation which both Yeats and Synge found in aspects of Irish life and culture was simply not available; such freedom had to be fought for and won by silence, exile and cunning, by a series of willed, even histrionic detachments” (Irish Identity 153). I would even argue that while Joyce criticised the Irish spirit and Dublin as its deadlock at the turn of the century in Dubliners, Ulysses presents a number of propositions indicating how the paralysis of the city could be overcome.

In this respect, Dubliners could be interpreted as depicting reality as perceived by Joyce, while moments referring to counter-concepts of this reality are exploited in Ulysses. By choosing 16 June 1904 as the setting for his universal novel, Gotzmann states, Joyce tried to capture the world in its entirety in order to grasp the normal course of life at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Ulysses, Dublin, now a place of modernity, a new metropolis, suddenly represents the world (22). To some extent then, there is a correlation between the minute geographical description of Ireland’s capital and the literary creation of Dublin as a mental concept.

In fact, the term omphalos, navel, occurs four times in the novel, underlining what an essential and vital position Dublin — or specifically the Martello
Tower – could occupy in the world. 28 *Ulysses* thus transfers the site of the *omphalos* from Delphi, “the center of prophecy in ancient Greece” and at the same time the hub of the earth and the universe in the Greek world, to Dublin and the twentieth century, thereby stressing the potential of the Irish capital (Gifford and Seidman 17). As Buck Mulligan, Stephen Dedalus and Haines currently live at the Martello Tower, the place has indeed turned into their centre of the universe. When Stephen Dedalus leaves the tower in the morning together with Buck Mulligan and Haines to go down to the sea, he locks the door and puts “the huge key in his inner pocket” (*Ulysses* 15). This act can be interpreted as carrying some deeper relevance: by holding on to the key of the *omphalos*, for the time being, Stephen has access to, as well as control over, his current home and metaphorically speaking over the private and hidden centre of the modern world. However, when he mentions that he is leaving, Buck Mulligan asks Stephen to hand over the key to Haines and himself. Sulking privately, Stephen vows to himself: “I will not sleep here tonight” but he is well aware that having refused to pray at his mother’s deathbed “[h]ome [i.e. to his parent’s house] also I cannot go” (19). Stephen’s use of the word “usurper” to refer to Buck Mulligan indicates that he dislikes his friend’s powerful influence, Buck Mulligan’s friendship with the Englishman Haines, and his dominant behaviour in general (19).

Passing the key on to Buck Mulligan and Haines means that, despite paying the rent for the Martello Tower, Stephen is, at a later stage, locked out from his temporary home. Forced to kill time, Stephen spends time with Bloom, who is likewise trying to postpone his return home. When Bloom, having invited Stephen to his home, finally arrives “[a]t the housesteps of the 4th of the equidifferent uneven numbers, number 7 Eccles street, he inserted his hand mechanically into the back pocket of his trousers to obtain his latchkey,” only to find out that “[i]t was in the corresponding pocket of the trousers which he had worn on the day but one preceding” (546). Thus, “the keyless couple” contemplates on whether “[t]o enter or not to enter. To knock or not to knock” (546). In this scene, Bloom and Stephen are presented as barred from entering their homes as well as excluded from their own private realms. They wonder whether they should invade Molly’s private space, and possibly her privacy, by entering, and if so, whether they should politely knock to prepare Molly for this intrusion into her private sphere. These questions in *Ulysses*, a novel which is characterised by revealing the hidden and private, present a remarkable

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28 The translation of *omphalos* was taken from Liddell and Scott’s dictionary *A Greek-English Lexicon* (“Omphalos” 1229). The term is mentioned in Joyce’s *Ulysses* on pages 7, 15, 32 and 329.
variation of Hamlet’s dilemma “[t]o be or not to be, that is the question” 
(*Hamlet* 3.1.56). Loathing the powerlessness of the situation, Bloom finally decides to regain his home using

[a] stratagem. Resting his feet on the dwarf wall, he climbed over the area railings, compressed his hat on his head, grasped two points at the lower union of rails and stiles, lowered his body gradually by its length of five feet nine inches and a half to within two feet ten inches of the area pavement and allowed his body to move freely in space by separating himself from the railings and crouching in preparation for the impact of the fall. (*Ulysses* 546)

Climbing over the wall, Bloom and Stephen literally invade the space which Bloom has left to Molly and Hugh Boylan during the day. This indicates that, although Bloom lingered in the city for as long as possible, he is now willing to reclaim the private space of his home.

Early in the morning, when Buck Mulligan is shaving outside the Martello Tower talking to Stephen, he asks for a similarly active role in overcoming hemiplegia in Dublin. He declares that if Stephen and himself worked together, they could alter the current situation in Ireland and transform the island. In fact, the mirror which Buck Mulligan uses initially reminds Stephen of the Irish people’s destiny: “It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant” (6). Taking up Stephen’s metaphor, Buck Mulligan hints at his hidden expectations and dreams for the country suggesting that Ireland could become as cultured as Greece once was: “Cracked lookingglass of a servant! [...] God, Kinch [i.e. Stephen], if you and I could only work together we might do something for the island. *Hellenise* it” (6, my emphasis). The ancient Greek civilisation is taken as a model for Ireland at the turn of the century, thereby offering an alternative to the prevalent provincialism of Dublin as presented in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In connection with the repeated use of the term *omphalos*, this quote shows that Dublin is envisaged as the source of new antique grandeur.

As indicated above, Joyce’s view with regard to reviving culture in Ireland differs greatly from the approaches chosen by Yeats and Synge. Nevertheless, what they all have in common is the value they ascribe to the power of art: for Joyce, “his hero is the Artist” (*Watson, Irish Identity* 151). Thus, Joyce claims that through creativity Dublin could take up a different position in the world and escape the present constrictions in his homeland. On a textual level, Joyce tried to implement this belief by starting to experiment. Exploring with genres, styles and narrative devices, he attempted to invent new forms of expression in order to abandon the constraints that made him feel powerless in political and social matters. The most noticeable technique which Joyce adopted and developed to meet his own needs is his frequent use of stream of
consciousness or interior monologue. In *A Handbook to Literature*, Holman and Harmon define the term *interior monologue* as

> [o]ne of the techniques for presenting the stream of consciousness of a character. Recording the internal, emotional experience of the character it reaches downward to the nonverbalized level where images must be used to represent sensations or emotions. It assumes the unrestricted and uncensored portrayal of the totality of interior experience. It gives, therefore, the appearance of being illogical and associational. (249)

The direct interior monologue as used in *Ulysses* is a technique “in which the author seems not to exist and the interior self of the character is given directly, as though the reader were overhearing an articulation of the stream of thought and feeling flowing through the character’s mind [...]” (249). The personal experiences, feelings and thoughts of the three main protagonists in Joyce’s text considerably shape the atmosphere of the novel. By following the actions of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus as they move through the urban space and by familiarising the reader with their – as well as Molly Bloom’s – most intimate thoughts, the loss of coherence and security experienced in Modernism is partly compensated for. According to Erzgräber,

> ‘everyday life’ of Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom and Stephen Dedalus is made up by their manifold associations and reflections which are evoked by what they are experiencing at the moment; ‘everyday life,’ moreover, consists of the sum of all the spiritual, philosophical, theological and social traditions which define life in Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century. Finally, ‘everyday life’ is the sum of all the outer factual and the inner psychic and intellectual factors which can shape human life. (97, my translation)\(^29\)

In order to make the characters’ inner life as well as their epiphanies available to the reader, both *Ulysses* and *Dubliners* are characterised by internalisation and a strong concentration on privateness; the reader thus has access to the characters’ most personal reflections and feelings. In Molly Bloom’s interior monologue, the reader is turned into a confidant, with whom she shares her most secret thoughts. Burgess explains that interior monologue as a

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29 Original: Zum “Alltag” gehören bei Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom und Stephen Dedalus die vielfältigen Assoziationen und Reflexionen, die durch ihr momentanes Erlebnis geweckt werden; “Alltag” ist darüber hinaus auch die Summe aller geistigen, philosophischen, theologischen und sozialen Traditionen, die das Leben in Dublin zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts bestimmen. “Alltag” ist schließlich die Summe aller äusseren faktischen und aller inneren psychischen und intellektuellen Faktoren, die menschliches Leben beeinflussen können. (97)
Molly reveals her most intimate thoughts and sexual fantasies to the reader, and thereby compensates for the lack of confidentiality that is missing among the characters in the text. Regardless of the fact that the characters have a vivid inner life, silence and miscommunication govern their interactions. Both Bloom and Molly are partly aware of their partner’s infidelity. Molly has observed Bloom scribbling a message to Martha Clifford and Bloom immediately grasps the situation when Molly hides Hugh Boylan’s letter, which he hands her, under her pillow. However, instead of voicing their worries or insecurities, they remain silent: on the plot level, secrecy and concealment rule the scene. Contrary to Beckett’s and Friel’s characters, as will be shown, Joyce’s protagonists do not even attempt to establish common ground to increase familiarity and intimacy amongst each other. Bloom and Molly’s relationship is rather defined by a certain hollowness. Jung concluded that in Molly’s chapter

the suffocating emptiness becomes so unbearably tense that it reaches the bursting point. This utterly hopeless emptiness is the dominant note of the whole book. It not only begins and ends in nothingness, it consists of nothing but nothingness. (9–10)

Fischer indicates that in the two interior monologues in Ulysses in the Proteus and Penelope chapters intimacy is self-directed: sender and receiver of the message “are one and the same person,” there is no mediation whatsoever (241). Referring to Joos’ linguistic study of different degrees of formality, Fischer further concludes that the interior monologue “is an extreme variety of intimate style, or even the most intimate style possible” (242). This intimate style of Molly is linguistically achieved by the frequent use of colloquialism and incomplete syntactic structures as well as a lack of punctuation. Hence, intimacy in Ulysses is only transmitted on a narratological level, where it is witnessed by the reader, who in the end knows more about the characters than they know about each other. Nevertheless, although

Molly’s main concern is her personal and private life, she provides not only a glimpse into her inner self, as is generally acknowledged, but also – as the wife of Leopold Bloom – she provides a vital post of observation of him. […] Molly’s monologue literally begins and ends with Bloom […]. (Sandulescu 114)

Molly Bloom’s interior monologue illustrates Habermas’ and Lehnert’s argument, as outlined in the chapter on the theoretical approaches when
defining the public and the private, that, as a result of cultural and historical transformations of the public sphere, nothing after Freud is left which cannot be expressed and shared with the reader. As indicated, Lehnert further claims that due to the language developed by psychoanalysis around 1900, a degree of intimacy could be expressed for which there had been no words before. Nevertheless, intimacy in this context showed a strong tendency to be reduced to sexuality (13). The language of psychoanalysis, however, quite generally provided characters with the vocabulary needed to verbalise their own feelings, experiences, memories and senses – in short, their most intimate perception of the world. In a world bereft of meaning, Lehnert identifies people’s immense longing for deeper significance in their lives (82). Comparing their personal views with a given public truth, the language of psychoanalysis enabled people to formulate their own, entirely personal, counter-realities. Furthermore, it allowed them to establish their own variation of certain myths. This linguistic power to rewrite and personalise myths goes hand in hand with the speaker’s creation of identity and the attempt to regain a sense of autochthony. However,

[...] memory is misleading. It constantly transforms that which has been – and yet, precisely in this change can the actual, psychological truth be found according to Freud: not the seemingly objective events are of importance, but that which the subjective memorising makes of it: it produces truth. This makes memory work potentially endless, but always leads towards the present in that its aim is the present ego. Besides, memory is always a private entity which can only be compared to myth; a last attempt to establish a new rootedness in the history of mankind in a completely secularised world that is totally obsessed with the present. This rootedness is one of the main reasons for the overwhelming success of psychoanalysis in the western hemisphere [...]. (84, my translation, original emphasis)

Although it is paradoxical to publish privateness and illusionary to share intimacy with others without losing the personal and unique element in the process, this is what Joyce ultimately strives for in *Ulysses*. Intimacy is

30 Habermas’ and Lehnert’s interpretation of the impact which Freud’s use of language had on the transformation of the private and the public realm is found in Chapter II (p. 17–20).

31 Original: […] die Erinnerung ist trügerisch. Sie verändert ständig das, was war – aber genau in dieser Veränderung, so Freud, liegt die eigentliche, die psychologische Wahrheit: Nicht die vermeintlich objektiven Ereignisse sind von Belang, sondern das, was die subjektive Erinnerungsarbeit daraus macht: Sie schafft Wahrheit. Die Arbeit des Erinnerns wird somit potentiell endlos, aber sie führt immer zur Gegenwart, denn ihr Ziel ist das jetzige Ich. Und die Erinnerung ist immer eine private, die nur mit dem Mythos verglichen wird: letzter Versuch, sich in der endgültig säkularisierten und gegenwartsversessenen Welt eine neue Verwurzelung in der Menschheitsgeschichte zu schaffen. Diese Verwurzelung gehört zu den wesentlichen Gründen für den überwältigenden Erfolg der Psychoanalyse in der westlichen Welt [...]. (84, original emphasis)
undermined in any book or play where it is articulated publicly, but — although Joyce denounced Freud’s influence on his works — psychoanalysis and the language of Freud appear to have unconsciously provided a subtext for the works of Joyce, who transformed the private and the secret realm into a cult.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that Joyce chose Dublin as the setting for his texts to draw attention to the many constraints he perceived in the Irish capital at the turn of the century. Trapped by these conditions, Joyce’s characters suffer from the prevailing atmosphere of dullness and lapse into a state of paralysis. Moreover, they exhibit a profound lack of intimacy amongst each other. However, Joyce’s extensive use of interior monologue — or in other words, the characters’ revelation or publication of their private and most intimate thoughts — enables the reader to witness the characters’ vivid inner life. On a narratological level, Joyce’s strong emphasis on the characters’ most intimate side of their personality tears down traditional boundaries established between public and private realms. This structural device offers Joyce the opportunity to present an entirely different, yet much more intimate, notion of true Irishness.

Contrary to the setting Joyce opted for, Samuel Beckett’s plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are “set in a vaguely European context which is not Ireland and not any other recognizable place. Against the tradition in Irish drama of quite specific local references, Beckett’s drama is distinctly vague in regard to scene and setting” (Harrington 172). As will be outlined in this reading, Beckett’s protagonists are no longer securely rooted in the homes of a distinct (Irish) village, and the choice of his desolate settings symbolises the void into which characters are thrown from an existentialist point of view.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon live as two tramps on an unidentifiable road in the middle of nowhere. Albeit the difference in setting, Kiberd argues that Beckett’s choice of two tramps as protagonists for this play indicates his indebtedness to Irish literary traditions:

> The image of the migrant, tramp or traveller is taken up from Gaelic tradition not just because displacement is a condition of the modern intellectual but more especially because such a figure is adaptive. Of such characters one might say what Salman Rushdie observes of postcolonial exiles in *Imaginary Homelands*: ‘they are people who root themselves in ideas rather than in places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves because they are so defined by others – by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they are and where they find themselves.’ The migrant is not simply transformed into a hybrid by travels; she or he creates a wholly new art by virtue of multiple locations. (“Literature and Politics” 29)

Completely uprooted, dispossessed and “bored to death,” Vladimir and Estragon spend their time waiting for Godot, “a kind of acquaintance” of
their (Waiting for Godot 81 and 23). Sadly, they have a rather faint notion of this figure and Estragon admits that “[p]ersonally I wouldn’t even know him if I saw him” (23). Not surprisingly, he keeps forgetting exactly what they are waiting for and is left with no purpose in life. Vladimir, on the other hand, clings to the only piece of certainty and meaning which he believes their waiting is supposed to offer in this desolate situation:

What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come – […]. Or for night to fall. (Pause) We have kept our appointment, and that’s an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much? (80, original emphasis)

Even Vladimir’s self-assurance slowly vanishes in the course of his own statement. In the end, he claims that their feat is rooted in not having abandoned their moral standards and position in this uncertainty.

The setting chosen in Endgame is even bleaker: enclosed in a room with two windows, the curtains of which are drawn to increase the prevailing atmosphere of claustrophobia, the characters feel they are the only people alive, the only ones who were spared from death (15 and 32). Complaining that “[t]he whole place [i.e. the space they inhabit] stinks of corpses” (33), Hamm condemns the universe and makes a clear statement about his attitude towards life on earth suggesting that “[b]eyond is the other hell” (23). Referring to what he experiences as a post-apocalyptic existence, Hamm assumes that “[n]ature has forgotten us. […] But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals! […] No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we” (16). Wondering “[w]hat’s happening” or “taking its course,” Hamm and Clov are faced with “the same questions, the same answers” throughout their lives (26 and 13). However, Hamm, in contrast to Clov, is fond of the old questions. They offer some order and a kind of consistency and continuity in a world defined by “existential homelessness” (Coetzee 20). In fact, these same old questions that reappear in Beckett’s plays are not the only means used by the characters trying to pass time and to ease their agony and homelessness. Indeed, repetition appears not only on a verbal but also on a structural level, which provides them with some kind of order to hold on to:

Instead of following the tradition which demands that a play have an exposition, a climax and a dénouement, Beckett’s plays have a cyclical structure which might indeed be better described as a diminishing spiral. […] In this spiral descending towards a final closure that can never be found in the Beckettian universe, the characters take refuge in repetition, repeating their own actions and words and often those of others – in order to pass the time. (Worton 69)
In the long run, however, none of the repetitive actions or words nor the rituals they indulge in reduces their burden. Hamm outlines Clov’s miserable and lonely future when he announces that

[one day you’ll be blind, like me. You’ll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me. [...] Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn’t fill it, and there you’ll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. (Endgame 28–29)

Therefore, living “in the midst of nothingness,” in this void, Beckett’s characters in Waiting for Godot and Endgame inhabit a world of uncertainties and “abyssal depths” (Waiting for Godot 81 and 80).

In some respect, their world resembles that of Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man after he pronounces the three concepts home, fatherland, and church dead and refuses to serve that in which he has ceased to believe (251). However, Stephen deliberately chooses to abolish these traditional ideals of place, nationhood and religion in his life, all of which have provided people with a sense of belonging for centuries. In his eyes, these terms have become empty signifiers that are no longer worth fighting for and they fail to meet his expectations. With regard to his future, Stephen claims: “I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning” (251). Although his newly established world lacks the definite framework offered by the former reference points, the quote underlines that Stephen is still in full control of his life and actions. Hence, he does not suffer from the change of paradigm. His creativity fills the void. By contrast, Beckett’s characters are in a rather different situation. Although the elements of silence, exile, and cunning are also present in Beckett’s oeuvre, these terms have entirely different connotations. In the Beckettian world, none of Stephen’s control and composure is conveyed. In fact, his protagonists feel exposed to this void that is representative of their world. They are in a continual struggle to gain some kind of understanding of their existence. Thus, “the Beckettian universe [is] governed by rules that [are], at bottom, philosophical” (Pattie 105). Nonetheless, the characters’ efforts are – naturally – in vain; as a result, they feel more and more powerless and exiled in a world without apparent meaning. The numerous instances when they lapse into silence in the midst of their conversation come to symbolise the lack of meaning and coherence which they experience and suffer from being thrown into this void:

The “oddities” of Beckettian characters always also portray the particular embodiment of universal issues. The issues are usually splitting, fragmentation, isolation,
nothingness, and death, presented in a fashion that appals, while, at the same time, posing the question of how moments of laughter, liveliness, love, grace, and consolation occur. (Smith xv-xvi)

Despite the fact that Beckett’s scenes contain comic aspects, the characters behave as if their experience of life were characterised by a constant staring into a baseless abyss which results in their increasing insecurity and a deeply felt sense of unease. Their physical handicaps – the disabilities range from characters being blind, lame and deaf to those who have lost their legs – serve as metonymies for the immense psychological suffering the characters are undergoing as a result of their powerlessness. “[H]uman loneliness, physical disintegration, mental alienation, intellectual fiasco, creative failure, and above all the unavoidable dualism of mind and body, reality and fiction” have indeed been identified as some of the most prominent aspects in Beckett’s plays (Federman as quoted by Pattie 121).

If analysed from a philosophical point of view, Beckett’s characters experience their *Dasein*, their Being-in-the-world, – to express it in Heidegger’s terminology – in a much more passive manner than Stephen Dedalus. Having been thrown into a world from which order, “traditional coherence and meaning” – and thus certainty – have been withdrawn, Beckett’s characters struggle to cope in an absurd world of “doubt and unknowingness” (Graver 24 and 22). The absurdity of life, as addressed from an existentialist standpoint in Beckett’s plays, is, according to Cooper, based on

the assumption that it is no longer possible to believe that there is some transcendent justification or underlying ground for our existence. If God is dead, then we find ourselves ‘abandoned’, ‘forlorn’, ‘thrown’ into a world, with no pregiven direction or legitimation. Though we seek some overarching meaning and purpose for our lives, we have to face the fact that there is no ‘proper function of humans’ or ‘plan in God’s mind’ that tells us the right way to be human. (494)32

The loss of basic truths and preconceptions about human existence and nature is, according to existentialist philosophers, closely related to feelings of anxiety, anguish or dread. In his “Postscript to ‘What is Metaphysics?’” (1943), Heidegger examines the relation between anxiety, the ‘nothing’ and the uncanny. He identifies the ‘nothing’ as “the horror of the abyss,” which metaphysical studies are quintessentially concerned with (“Postscript” 233). Oppenheim further argues that

32 The various philosophical influences on Samuel Beckett’s work have been examined in great detail by Richard Lane in his book *Beckett and Philosophy*. For my own reading of Samuel Beckett’s plays, I will embed his choice of setting and atmosphere in the philosophical studies of Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre.
In *Being and Time* the uncanny is located in the facticity of Dasein’s encounter with the ‘nothing’ of the world. ‘[A]nxiety,’ writes Heidegger, ‘brings [Dasein] back from its absorption in the ‘world’ and, as ‘[e]veryday familiarity collapses’ and Dasein is individualized, it enters ‘the existential ‘mode’ of the not-at-home.’ Similarly, in his 1919 paper on the subject Freud focuses on the horrifying quality of that which is unhomelike or unhomely, on the ‘un’ of the *unheimlich* that serves not to oppose it to the *heimlich*, but to reveal its origin within it: ‘[T]he ‘uncanny’ is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar. In a word, then, the uncanny originates in an emergence of the negated or repressed. (128)

Although Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* do not change their position in the course of the play and Hamm in *Endgame* repeatedly demands to be positioned right in the centre of the stage, Beckett’s characters experience their environment as unhomely and uncanny. In his book *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre suggests that “it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself” (65). Hence, freedom is by no means idealised by Sartre. In his lecture on “Existentialism,” he claims that “existence precedes essence” (345). In other words, “human freedom operates against a background of facticity and situation,” whereby “facticity is all the facts about myself which cannot be changed,” be it one’s “age, sex, class of origin, race and so on” (Howells 474, original emphasis). Freedom, on the other hand, is defined as the options or free choices the individual is presented “within a given set of circumstances, after a particular past, and against the expectations” of both oneself and others (474, original emphasis). Beckett’s characters are thus examples of characters who – as Sartre suggested – are disgusted when they realise that they live in a world without apparent purpose, are condemned to freedom, and are asked to compose their own meaning in life and to make their own decisions. Incapable of understanding their existence, let alone starting to grasp their essence, Beckett’s characters feel deeply alienated and lonely, their *Dasein* consists of mere suffering. In fact, Estragon summarises their private truth claiming that “[n]othing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful!” (*Waiting for Godot* 41) Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly consider committing suicide as a result of their not-at-homeness in their *Dasein*. This perception of existence can be described in greater detail by examining Kierkegaard’s outlook on the world. The philosopher suggested that human beings are not willing to accept existence as a mere fact, but keep trying to find an explanation and acceptable purpose for their existence. In *Either/Or* (1843), he distinguishes between two different phases of existence, namely the aesthetic and the ethic, both of which are finally superseded by a phase which he referred to as the religious mode. In her study of Kierkegaard’s work, Pieper argues that
Kierkegaard was convinced that in order to control one’s anxiety, the human being had to believe in God and accept the absurd notion of faith (MacIntyre 64). Although Beckett’s characters share the characteristics used to describe the wretchedness of Kierkegaard’s figures, they lack this profound belief in God. The existence of a transcendental figure in Beckett is not categorically denied, but certainly called into question. Vladimir and Estragon’s suffering is symptomatic of Beckett’s protagonists. Estragon is particularly doubtful and uncertain whether Godot, the (transcendental?) figure they long for, will ever arrive, and he presumes at times that Godot has either forgotten them or might not really exist. Worton claims that regardless of the fact that both in Act One and Two they are told that Godot will arrive on the following day, his absence further intensifies their misery:

Much has been written about who or what Godot is. My own view [i.e. Worton’s view] is that he is simultaneously whatever we think he is and not what we think he is: he is an absence, who can be interpreted at moments as God, death, the lord of the manor, a benefactor, even Pozzo, but Godot has a function rather than a meaning. He stands for what keeps us chained to and in existence, he is the unknowable that represents hope in an age when there is no hope, he is whatever fiction we want him to be – as long as he justifies our life-as-waiting. […] So that audiences would […] think about how all existence is a waiting. (70–71, original emphasis)

When the behaviour and state of mind of Beckett’s characters is compared to the characteristics of Kierkegaard’s aesthetic figures, as described above, Beckett’s universe must be described as being overcrowded with such melancholic, depressed and disillusioned representatives. According to Ken-

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33 Original: Die ästhetischen Figuren, die Kierkegaard aufmarschieren lässt, finden zwar im Genuss eine Befriedigung, aber dennoch sind sie allesamt unglücklich, weil sie begreifen, dass es ihnen mittels des Ästhetischen nicht gelingt, jenen Gesamtsinn zu verwirklichen, den sie in ihrer Vorstellung von einem guten Leben mehr oder weniger bewusst antizipiert haben. Am aufschlussreichsten sind diesbezüglich die Aufzeichnungen des Dichters A […]. Man braucht nur die in seiner Selbstdarstellung auftauchenden Charakteristika aufzulisten, um sich ein Bild von der Trostlosigkeit des ästhetischen Daseins zu machen: Langeweile, Trübsinn, Schwermut, Leiden an der Welt und an sich selbst, Sinnlosigkeit in allem, Lebensüberdruss, Immobilität, Beklommenheit, Traurigkeit, Ängste, Freundlosigkeit, Illusionslosigkeit, Einsamkeit. (63)
neth and Alice Hamilton, “the misery of the human condition is not only the most obvious theme in Beckett, but also the best clue to interpreting his works” (as quoted by Pattie 148). They further explain that

Beckett’s works ask us to see the outlines of a universe beyond redemption; of a human condition bedevilled by suffering and even more bedevilled by the illusion of hope; of man’s destiny to endure the meaningless activity within a purgatory allowing him no rest. Perhaps, infinitely slowly, the whole process in which man is trapped is grinding to a halt. Perhaps it will reach a final state of darkness and silence when the last word shall cease. Perhaps the prospect of an end is not merely a tantalising illusion built into the process, tempting man to torment himself still further. It really makes no difference, for it is present endurance that counts, not multiplying theories about this or that. The imagination can conceive as many worlds as it wishes – world without end. But, for Beckett, the believer’s affirmation, ‘World without end, Amen!’ [sic] is the ultimate terror and the final surrender. (as quoted by Pattie 148)

The loss of the traditionally given metaphysical dimension in life is thus not easily overcome in Beckett’s plays. The protagonists’ distress and woe due to their actual Dasein causes them to question the contingency and validity of their existence. Vladimir, at one stage, suggests that the key function of every single proceeding in Estragon and his life lies in preventing their “reason from foundering” (Waiting for Godot 80). Hamm offers further insight into his perception of human existence in one of his soliloquies in Endgame: “Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of … [be hesitates] … that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life” (45). In other words, the fundamental aim of Beckett’s characters is to grasp coherence in these single moments they experience in order to form a whole and to detect some meaning in life:

CLOV. Why this farce, day after day?
H Hamm. Routine. One never knows. [Pause.] Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore.
CLOV. Pah! You saw your heart.
H Hamm. No, it was living. [Pause. Anguished.] Clov!
CLOV. Yes.
H Hamm. What’s happening?
CLOV. Something is taking its course.
[...]
H Hamm. We’re not beginning to … to … mean something?
CLOV. Mean something! You and I, mean something! [Brief laugh.] Ah that’s a good one!
H Hamm. I wonder. [Pause.] Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn’t he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. [Voice of rational being.] Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they’re at! [Clov starts, drops the telescope and begins to
scratch his belly with both hands. Normal voice.] And without going so far as that, we ourselves … [with emotion] … we ourselves… at certain moments … [Vehemently.] To think perhaps it won’t all have been for nothing! (26–27)

This scene illustrates how Beckett’s characters oscillate between experiencing their lives as utterly meaningless and at the same time hoping that there is some purpose in life – a point these characters simply fail to grasp. Hamm thus indicates how he longs for his pains to be significant despite the restricted nature of human beings and hopes that their lives, which in their case are equivalent to suffering, are not pointless. He yearns for a creature more rational than them who would be able to detect a certain pattern or order in this universe if he searched and observed their behaviour and condition long enough. However, recognising that the old order and concepts of existence, meaning, religion have been lost for good, they fail to establish the new order they deeply long for. In a world where meaning is concealed, the characters also fail to establish stable and sustainable relations amongst one another distrusting their own feelings or claiming not to have any at all. In a brief exchange between father and son, Nagg’s revelation of his attitude towards Hamm is one of the most frigid and brutal passages in literature:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAMM.</th>
<th>Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NAGG.</td>
<td>I didn’t know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMM.</td>
<td>What? What didn’t you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAGG.</td>
<td>That it’d be you. (35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Beckett, even blood relationships are said to be meaningless. There is no bonding amongst characters, but at the same time an amazingly harsh and direct way of communicating this fact. Thus, however suspicious the protagonists are of relationships, they are well aware of how horrifying existence would be without the company of the other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAMM.</th>
<th>Why do you stay with me?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLOV.</td>
<td>Why do you keep me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMM.</td>
<td>There’s no one else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOV.</td>
<td>There’s nowhere else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Pause.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMM.</td>
<td>You’re leaving me all the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOV.</td>
<td>I’m trying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMM.</td>
<td>You don’t love me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOV.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMM.</td>
<td>You loved me once.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOV.</td>
<td>Once! (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hamm and Clov’s sense of belonging is based on space and relations; regardless of the fact that they are not at home in the space they inhabit and that they do not trust their friendship, their need to hold on to some familiar place and companion is still revealed in this scene. According to Kim, “[t]o these characters, to be the absolute person in the other’s life is connected with the confirmation of the meaning of existence” (55–56). In their companionship, these characters who are constantly searching for some kind of consistency in their lives seek to overcome the isolation of the self. Thus, their attempt to become indispensable or be the other character’s only hope is one strategy used to undermine uncertainty and to hold on to some kind of security (Endgame 38 and 39). The lack of certainty further stems from their loss of language and, along with it, their loss of history and the past. When Clov admits to have loved Hamm “[o]nce!” his enforced exclamation serves as an example to illustrate that their language as well as their experiences and feelings are no longer valid or even available to them (14). Words such as “once” or “yesterday” have likewise become empty signifiers in their universe. Asked by Hamm to define the meaning of “yesterday,” Clov replies “[t]hat means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don’t mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent” (32). Their language deficiency, therefore, mirrors their entire Dasein: the old meaning has been lost and they are waiting for it to be replaced, to be given new words to describe their existence, in the present or future:

*Godot* is grounded in the promise of an arrival that never occurs, *Endgame* is the promise of a departure that never happens. This would seem to imply that the characters look forward to the future, yet if there is no past, there can be neither present nor future. So in order to be able to project onto an unlocatable – and perhaps non-existent – future, the characters need to invent a past for themselves. And this they do by inventing stories. (Worton 73, original emphasis)

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett indeed suggests that inventing stories or articulating one’s personal experiences is a fundamental need of human beings. In order to escape the nothingness and the sense of loneliness as well as to evade the feeling of despair and utter devastation, the characters must converse even if they – at different stages – preferred not to:

**ESTRAGON.** Let’s stop talking for a minute, do you mind?

**VLADIMIR.** (feebly.) All right. (*Estragon sits down on the mound. Vladimir paces agitatedly to and fro, halting from time to time to gaze into distance off. *Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir bats before *Estragon.*) Gogo!… Gogo!… GOGO! *Estragon wakes with a start.*
ESTRAGON. *restored to the horror of his situation.* I was asleep! *(Despairingly).* Will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR. I felt lonely.

ESTRAGON. I had a dream.

VLADIMIR. Don’t tell me!

ESTRAGON. I dreamt that –

VLADIMIR. DON’T TELL ME!

ESTRAGON. *(gesture towards the universe).* This one is enough for you? *(Silence.)*

It’s not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can’t tell them to you?

VLADIMIR. Let them remain private. You know I can’t bear that. *(15–16)*

The dialogues between Estragon and Vladimir are repetitive. Time and again, they expound the same topics, trying to come to terms with reality and their situation. The process of ‘self-narrativisation’ is shown to be existential. Moreover, it appears to have some healing function or power for the speaker. On a bigger scale, I would argue that this aspect of catharsis, the sharing of one’s “private nightmares,” is the crucial momentum in postcolonial Anglo-Irish literature. In an Irish context, Beckett’s sentence spells out the collective nightmare the Irish have undergone: for centuries they have been misunderstood or misrepresented, and as they did not have power to control public opinion, they feel they have been wronged. Without the ability to possess land, it was difficult to survive. Large parts of the population were constantly on the verge of emigrating and losing touch with home. Estragon suggests that the sharing of their disastrous past might have a soothing effect on him, for neither their past nor their cultural background can die out as long as they continue verbalising it. Similarly, in keeping Gaelic mythologies and customs alive, the Irish have found a substitute for land and security. Storytelling has developed into a means of distinguishing themselves from the English and might well be regarded as an identity-forming or -supporting process. Furthermore, the need to voice their own experiences and to tell stories can be found in the tendency of Beckett’s characters to lapse into long soliloquies in which they try to come to terms with their past, their crooked reality and their existence.34 In

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34 The flux of language, lack of coherence and the loss of definite syntactic structures in Hamm’s soliloquies and Lucky’s tirades resemble a number of characteristics found in James Joyce’s interior monologues. Similarly as in James Joyce’s texts, in these long soliloquies Beckett’s characters express their own thoughts in a seemingly unstructured, floating manner. In Endgame, Hamm attempts to postpone the ending of his story. At the same time he admits that “I’ll soon have finished with this story. [Pause.] Unless I bring in other characters. [Pause.] But where would I find them? [Pause.] Where would I look for them? [Pause. He whistles. Enter Clov.] Let us pray to God” *(37).* Desperately aware that the ending of his story can no longer be postponed or delayed by means of imagination, he withdraws to ritualistic behaviour to preserve the soothing effect created by his storytelling.
spite of the speaker’s need for disclosure, however, Vladimir strictly refuses to listen to Estragon’s nightmares. He points out how agonising Estragon’s laments are for him. Thus, he begs Estragon to “[l]et them remain private” (16). I would argue that, both physically and psychologically, he cannot endure listening to these narratives; for Beckett’s characters, existence is painful and traumatising even if they do not indulge in their private nightmares or their (sub)consciousness.

However, it is not only nightmares that Beckett’s characters struggle with: memories are equally problematic. Asked whether he can recall a single “instant of happiness” in his life, Clov – devoid of (positive) past memories – encapsulates the entirety of his feelings and perceptions of the world by replying “[n]ot to my knowledge” (Endgame 42). In other words, Clov – in contrast to Brian Friel’s characters as I will show at a later stage – does not even remember a single moment in which he felt content and happy.35 As far as he is concerned, his entire past is a heap of unhappy memories.

Hamm’s parents, Nell and Nagg, on the other hand, both recall the story of the tailor on Lake Como. As Nell announces that she will leave Nagg, he tries to evoke their common memory of this instance as well as the feelings connected to the past event. Tragically, however, the characters’ two narratives, due to their different points of view, completely fail to match. They cannot recreate their shared experience. I fully agree with Gatewood’s interpretation of this scene when she observes that

Nagg and Nell manage to evoke a shared memory, but the circumstances of each one’s version of the memory differs [sic]: Nell remembers the depth and color of the water and her emotional state of happiness; Nagg remembers their boat capsizing resulting from Nell’s excitement following his “tailor story,” which he retells in the play. This instance demonstrates that memory attempts to evoke a past real scenario, and narrative attempts to establish the credibility of that scenario; but their differing accounts of the past undercut one another, thereby subverting the event’s causality and coherence and distancing Nagg and Nell from a concrete past as well as from one another […]. Nagg and Nell in Endgame attempt to evoke a shared past in order to unify their current, and separate, confinement. But their evocation of the past through memory serves an opposite end: rather than unite, the remembrance emphasizes the individuality of memory, revealing that it is always personal and never shared. (56–57)

As the couple do not succeed in building a bridge between their memories, Nell’s recollection of the water, “you could see down to the bottom. So white. So clean. […] Desert!,” also marks her final words – she dies having tried to share her memory in vain (Endgame 22). This whole scene illustrates how utterly incapable Beckett’s characters are of accepting the rules of modern

35 Memories in Friel’s writing will be discussed in Chapter IV (p. 219–225).
times in general and coping with difference. Heidegger suggests that *Dasein*, as Being-there, must have a place. Being-in-the-world is the basic state or fundamental existential constitution of *Dasein*. In Beckett, this sense of being-at-home in one’s environment is perceived as not graspable, often even missing. In Beckett’s universe, homelessness is comparable to a state Heidegger refers to as “coming to be the destiny of the world” (“Letter on ‘Humanism’” 258). Beckett’s characters indeed suffer from a type of “[h]omelessness in which not only human beings but the essence of the human being stumbles aimlessly about” and where one might say “[h]omelessness so understood consists in the abandonment of beings by being. Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of being” (“Letter to ‘Humanism’” 258).

In his *Discourse on Thinking*, Heidegger argues that “the rootedness, the *autochthony*, of man is threatened today at its core” and he expresses his view that the “loss of autochthony springs from the spirit of the age into which all of us were born” (48–49, original emphasis). However, Heidegger calls for a certain “[r]eleasement toward things [i.e. *Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*] and openness to the mystery” convinced that these two elements “grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way” and “give us a vision of a new autochthony which someday even might be fit to recapture the old and now rapidly disappearing autochthony in a changed form” (55). However, Beckett’s characters completely lack this releasement toward things and they fail to embrace a world whose ultimate meaning cannot be grasped. Life in Beckett is all suffering and misery: the characters constantly yearn for order and redemption, while – at the same time – deeply distrusting the very same concepts.

Summarising, in Anglo-Irish literature, the same change of paradigm can be observed as developed by Habermas in his study of the public sphere. Much of Anglo-Irish writing is concerned with retelling or reinventing Irish history because the public authorities, or those in control of the public voice, keep hiding the truth, either because the truth threatens them or because they are indeed unaware of the truth. And yet, the unspoken and hidden side cannot be repressed; it emerges again and again. What was first known or discussed within the private realm is voiced in literature. Literature becomes the space where the discourse of authority is systematically undermined and where – especially since Joyce – people’s intimate fantasies, emotions, feelings as well as their subjective truths are laid open. Being informed of the various characters’ private versions of truth, the reader or the theatre audience serve as Habermas’ political public sphere. The earliest Irish poems, quoted above, show that the Irish population did not intend to change the power distribution within the country, but took a more radical approach by rejecting the English presence as such. In the twentieth century, Anglo-Irish literature system-
atically brings to light the most intimate and private realm. In this sense, the writers developed a public sphere within the private realm while, in cases such as Synge’s account of the Aran Islands, trying to retain the sphere of intimacy. Unanimously though, the Anglo-Irish authors – independent of their different methods and convictions – wanted to uncover the immense private space that had been hidden from the colonisers and kept silent, suggesting that this is quintessentially the space of true Irishness. Using Freud’s language of intimacy, Joyce was the first author who finally tried to illustrate the dictates of his characters’ hearts and feelings in as precise a manner as possible and who was, hence, willing to unveil even the most intimate and private realm of the Irish soul.