Abstract
Throughout his early career Samuel Beckett placed increasing significance on painting as a medium that could surpass the artistic limitations that he believed were inherent within literature. His explorations into Modernist painting can therefore provide us with an intimate portrait of the struggling young writer seeking new possibilities of expression which could invigorate what he saw as a tired medium. Although Beckett primarily sought to solve this problem through his engagement with the work of continental artists, both his sensitivity to the limitations of literature and his awareness of the expressive possibilities of the visual arts were the result of the early influence of two of the major figures of Irish Modernism, James Joyce and Jack B. Yeats.

The diaries that Beckett kept throughout his travels through Weimar Germany, in 1936 and early 1937, provide an intimate portrait of his engagement with Modernist painting. Through an analysis of these diaries I will show how Beckett turned to the visual arts as a means of dealing with the 'literary crisis' that he believed he faced in the aftermath of the innovations that Joyce brought to the written word. Through a reading of Beckett's diaries and an analysis of the works that he discusses I will build a clear definition of the themes that drove Beckett’s explorations into the visual arts and define the characteristics of a typically ‘Beckettian’ approach to painting, an approach which Beckett would eventually bring to his own writing. Although Beckett discovered the personal significance of this specific type of painting through his explorations of German expressionism, I will show that the prototype of the ‘Beckettian’ picture is actually derived from the earlier influence of the paintings of Jack B. Yeats, in whose work we see a stylistic approach which helped Beckett to find his own unique literary voice.

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