

## Introduction

Changed the stone that draws her when revisited alone. Or she who changes it when side by side. Now alone it leans. Backward or forward as the case may be. Is it to nature alone it owes its rough-hewn air? Or to some too human hand forced to desist?

– *Ill Seen Ill Said*

In a story full of stones – fieldstone, megaliths, threshold stones, terrestrial planets, and satellites – *Ill Seen Ill Said* provides a grounding point for human agency and narrative subjectivity in the funerary stele ritually visited by the woman. This passage appears three-quarters of the way through the text, at which point the pull between the woman and the rocky landscape surrounding her hovel prompts questions of a more foundational kind regarding the human–stone relation at work in the narrative. On first sight these sentences seem to reflect upon the possibility and range of human agency as the protagonist is shaped by the narrating voice and observing eye, on the one hand, and as she approaches the condition of stone in her advancing moments of stasis, on the other. But a closer look at the prose suggests that agency is reversible, where stone becomes the actant – it ‘draws her’ – and human agency retreats – the ‘too human hand forced to desist’. The line between natural and carved stone becomes fuzzy, and the magnetism between human and stone seems to blend their identities together: ‘The stone draws her’ – as though composing a character sketch or narrative outline. The passage also draws attention to the artifice of narrative composition in the dense assonance and alliteration of its final two sentences. These lines also sound a dim echo: the ‘too human’ of Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* [1878]) – his first work in the aphoristic style and one that seeks to invert the customary paradigm of rationality and animality.

Beckett’s *geological imagination* probes the porous boundaries between human and mineral realms. Just as stone exerts its force on the construction of character, a lithic vocabulary draws attention to complex textual stratifications: layers of composition, the deployment of literary intertextuality and etymology, and the archaeology of memory undertaken by his narrators and by the author memorializing a substantial oeuvre. This geological imagination is evident throughout Beckett’s career, but becomes fully articulated in the late prose texts of *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho*, where a compulsive return to matters of the earth coexists with an intensely reflexive notion of the *matter* of literary production, in all its senses. This intimate relation between textual objects and textual substance fundamentally structures these late prose works, in the process grounding an archaeological method for reading them.

## Bedrock

Geology and mineralogy is everywhere in Samuel Beckett's work, from Molloy's sucking stones and the clink of the stonecutters' chisels in *Watt*, to the piece of grit on the steppe in *Endgame* and Estragon's Tarpeian Rock in *Waiting for Godot*, to the standing stones of *Ill Seen Ill Said* and the terrain of 'rift' and 'vast' in *Worstward Ho*. Beckett's deployment of geological imagery bears a specific relation to the stratified nature of memory and textual production, evident in the various ways he reanimates his own biography in the service of fiction. As a child he would collect stones from the beach at Greystones during summer holidays and store them in tree branches at home (Knowlson, 1996, 29), and his tramping the countryside and mountains of County Dublin and Wicklow with his father or alone directly informs the imagery, topography, and narrative scene in several of his prose and dramatic texts. Beckett's engagement with the history of Ireland and its profound literary and linguistic heritage has received sustained critical attention, including recent historicist and post-colonial evaluations, but his focus extends beyond and beneath the history of human habitation of the land to the geological forces giving it shape and texture.

Several of Beckett's characters aspire to the condition of stone, and Beckett gestures towards this bodily geology in a letter to Mary Manning Howe of 22 May 1937 when he compares his own cardiac arrhythmia to the 'hardened chest' of his friend George Pelorson, a kind of 'cardiac calculus' immune to the foibles of his own soft organic condition (quoted in Dukes, 2016, 35). He writes to Cissie Sinclair of Jack B. Yeats and to Thomas McGreevy of Jean-Antoine Watteau as artists of the inorganic, whose figures are petrified or mineral (*LI* 536 and 540). Beckett's characters and narrators navigate the varieties of geology, excavation, ruined landscapes, and human habitations – and indeed the decayed location of the human body and mind and their records in speech and script. If they ultimately seek to return to the condition of stone – as the figure of the woman illustrates in *Ill Seen Ill Said* – not only do they find geology exerting its own force upon them, but they engage with a terrestrial zone in which vast systems of life abide, hidden from view, further complicating the relation with the inorganic.

Recent research into 'deep life' has discovered a massive subterranean biosphere at extreme depths and temperatures within the earth's crust, making up seventy percent of the earth's bacteria and *archaea*, single-celled microorganisms lacking nuclei called *prokaryotes* (see Deep Carbon Observatory). Contrary to notions of the subsurface earth functioning primarily as a repository for the end of life (the grave) or the absence of life (minerals and archaeological ruins), it is instead the place where most life is to be found, entirely separated

from what goes on at the surface. This deep life resonates with allusions to such minerals as chalk and limestone in Beckett's work, which are composed of skeletal fragments of marine organisms such as corals and molluscs. These relations between the animate and the mineral, between life and non-life, underline the subtlety of Beckett's mineralogical metaphors and how they register the complicity between the dimensions of life and the inanimate. These metaphors regulate the relations between narrative subjects and objects, voice and inscription, motion and stasis, and the text surface and its archive: the fictionalized documents and revisions within specific narratives as well as Beckett's physical notebooks and other objects of his grey canon; the store of intertextual references including Beckett's own work; and the workings of memory in narrators and characters within and across his texts.

### Styles of Interment

Beckett's geological imagination finds its full force in the texts of *Nohow On*, but these narratives demonstrate continuities with his oeuvre and illustrate his lifelong working methods. From at least as early as *Murphy* Beckett's prose narratives draw attention to themselves as constructed, mediated objects. This reflexive mode of writing is given expression in the presence of footnotes and addenda, breaks in the text surface, the lurking shadows of editors and scribes, and narrators breaking the 'fourth wall' to comment upon the conditions of writing or devising the text at issue, or to reflect upon (and often withdraw) specific narrative choices. Narrators contemplate the design of their worlds and the agency of their long-suffering subjects, and they often seek recourse in geological and archaeological images, allusions, and etymologies. *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho* each raise the intensity of this narrative and textual reflexivity, and they demonstrate Beckett's intensive focus on matters of the earth – cromlechs, statuary, buried objects, geology and geomorphology, and especially the dense etymological textures that ground his language in geological metaphors and images. His narrators exercise their creative powers of imagination by raising (and withdrawing) aspects of character, where the potential capacity for consciousness in protean narrative subjects invokes questions of narrative agency and the possibilities of writing in the first instance.

Despite such continuities, the three late narratives of *Nohow On* embody a shift in the way textual awareness and geological tropes relate to one another: they become twinned aspects of a subtle archaeological project in which the stratigraphy of Beckett's oeuvre, and the literary tradition with which it engages, reveals itself in the language and imagery of these late texts. As narrators raise effigies of character, this verbal statuary casts a critical reflection

upon the status of the textual object: a porous surface constructed on the layers of deep time, manifested in literary reference to Beckett's own texts and to specific aspects of the literary tradition, particularly Romantic poetry. The question of agency imbued in the creation of character – when and how do these effigies attain consciousness? can they approach the condition of stone? – and the potential agency of the lithic objects with which they interact transforms from a theoretical concern to a mode of reflection on the text object itself. Each of *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho* bears metafictional residues, but in crossing between narrative reflexivity and a contemplation of textual materiality – the surfaces on which texts are inscribed and their capacity for disintegration and preservation – these narratives become archaeological objects in their own right. As the workings of memory produce an archaeology of the mind – Beckett's debt to psychology and to Freud in particular – textual memory is embodied in the materiality of narrative and the constitution of the words and images that bind them together: literary reference, etymology, and the bare fact of inscription on paper and stone.

*Company* turns on the production of narrative subjects – who may be figments or confected objects given temporary animation – in the act of narrating remembered episodes from earlier texts, which themselves manifest a provenance in Beckett's biography. This archaeology of memory anchors itself in images of geology, Neolithic structures, and geomorphology, where the etymology of key words and intertextual reference circle back to earthy matters. The affinity between the workings of the narrative mind and matters of geology in *Company* becomes the substance or fabric of the text in *Ill Seen Ill Said*. The narrative *mise en scène* is dominated by the hovel with its flagstone, the 'zone of stones', the 'Twelve' – a Neolithic standing stone circle – and the headstone of a burial site. But the old woman is its epicentre, closely observed by the narrator who sees her approach the condition of stone. Etymology and literary reference turn on geological concepts and imagery, as though the narrator attempts to bridge the subjectivity retained by the woman with the narrative object she approaches but does not quite become. *Worstward Ho* turns the geological imagination a degree further, fusing the production of text material with the language of geomorphology. As character is diminished into three 'shades', the creation and decreation of these narrative objects impel an intensive geological vocabulary. The diminishment of character into partially realized narrative objects, set within a landscape grounded in geological etymologies, culminates in the image of pinpricks in a page, where the ground of composition is not the landscape of realist narrative but the projection of images in a camera obscura, returning the reader to Beckett's early ambition to puncture the veil of language to reveal the nothingness behind.

The four sections of this Element trace out the evolution of Beckett's geological imagination. The first section provides an overview across numerous dramatic works, novels and short prose, as well as the occasional poem, to demonstrate the consistency with which Beckett draws on his geological fund. There is a surprising richness in these themes and images, and while they do vary in their effects – the earlier prose works draw on the topography of Wicklow where the later prose tends to engage in more abstract themes of desolation or confinement – the aim is to provide a broad context for the sections to follow rather than to engage in extended analysis. This having been said, the continuities with the three sections that follow are clear – each dwells on a single text of *Nohow On* – especially when considered in relation to such themes as posthumanism, theories of the object, textual genesis, and the material or archival turn in Modernism Studies.

### Field Objects

Beckett's late prose engages geological images and concepts in ways that are grounded in the constitution of the text itself: etymology evident in deliberate word choices, literary allusion, and the production of reflexive narratives with their own material bases in the fictionalized act of writing. These strategies suggest strong affinities with recent theoretical and analytic work on materialism, objects, and thinghood. Geological and archaeological objects invite consideration of their provenance as well as their relation to the narrative and its various subjects. They also invite consideration with regard to the posthumanist development of New Materialism or Object-Oriented Ontology: a field (or fields) in which human agency does not comprise a central or even a peripheral concern, but instead the agency of things prevails, especially non-living objects. This philosophical development finds its dominant expression in literary studies and gender studies (Grusin, 2015; Braidotti, 2013; Bogost, 2012; Harmon, 2002) as well as political science (Bennett, 2010; Coole and Frost, 2010), and informs recent work in Beckett Studies: in Jonathan Boulter's *Posthuman Space in Samuel Beckett's Shorter Prose* (2019), Derval Tubridy's *Samuel Beckett and the Language of Subjectivity* (2018), Julie Bates's *Beckett's Art of Salvage: Writing and Material Imagination, 1932–1987* (2017), Steven Connor's *Beckett, Modernism, and the Material Imagination* (2014), and in shorter studies by Jean-Michel Rabaté (2016) and Alexander Price (2014), among others.

Boulter calls *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho* 'fables of posthuman space', suggesting how New Materialism can inform the ways narrative space and physical space can be thought of as mutually constitutive,

opening the way for the study of geology and archaeology in Beckett's late prose buttressed by these theoretical and analytic advances. Archaeology, a field that has the study of inanimate objects of human fabrication at its core, has also turned to questions of the agency of objects (Olsen, 2010; Olsen, Chanks, Webmoor, and Witmore, 2012). Jeffrey Jeremy Cohen brings into focus the large scale of geologic time and the lithic presence in literature (with an emphasis on medieval literature) in *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (2015). By placing the non-human, and even the non-animate, at the centre of questions of agency, this broad field of inquiry displaces the anthropocentric reflex in thinking about place, space, and the existence of things.

The word *thing* itself embeds temporal processes – deriving from the Old English and Old Norse *þing* ('assembly, meeting') and the Proto-Indo-European root *\*tenk-* ('stretch of time'). Although its meaning later changed to 'entity' or 'matter', the transactional implications embedded in the term *thing* have become something of a focal point in contemporary theory and are being read productively in modern literary representations of things, particularly in Beckett's texts. As Olsen notes: 'Things are not just traces or residues of absent presents; they are effectively engaged in assembling and hybridizing periods and epochs' (Olsen, 2010, 108). Beckett's insistent foregrounding of objects and their agency in narrative, precariously balanced with intensely self-aware (and often fragmented or disintegrating) narrative agents, plays out precisely this kind of thinking about the imposition of human agency upon a world formed by virtue of its force. But more than this, Beckett's objects – and none more so than his mineralogical objects such as the standing stones of *Ill Seen Ill Said* – begin to push back, asserting an agency of their own: agency separate from the human and in several respects shaping and even constituting the latter in a reversal of the anthropocentric scene.

Each of these recent directions in literary studies bears obvious connections to Beckett's geological imagination. But Beckett's narrators and dramatic interlocutors also deal in themes such as the possibility of consciousness, the contemplation of free agency and the fear of compulsion, the zone of dreams and the unconscious and its intersections with conscious life, and the workings of memory and trauma – mental, emotional, and physical. How do these dimensions of Beckett's texts engage with the geological?

Themes of mind and consciousness find expression in geological images and tropes in a range of texts across Beckett's career – as will be elaborated in the next section – but the specific terms of reflexivity in evidence in the texts of *Nohow On* introduce new methods for thinking through geology and consciousness. Extended Mind theory, elaborated by Andy Clark and David Chalmers in 1998, proposes that objects in the world can be considered as part of the mind's

apparatus. The processes of consciousness operate as a coupled system, where external objects extend the mind into the world as long as they function with similar purpose to 'internal' faculties of the mind. Beckett's prominent use of prosthetic devices in his fiction and drama – Malone's notebooks and pencil, wheelchairs in *Endgame* and *Rough for Theatre I*, bicycles, prods, and even other characters – all suggest the notion of bodily and cognitive extension as a lifelong preoccupation. Yet in the later prose works the deeply reflexive nature of narration, and its capacity to register itself and the narrative world it describes on a singular plane of immanence, animates some of these external objects in fundamental ways.

### Text Mining

The rise of digital methods in literary studies has produced new ways of thinking about how literary content relates to the wider discursive formations of literature. Franco Moretti's model of distant reading has proved to be influential in thinking about larger structures of literary production and consumption, especially when trained upon long historical periods, diverse geographic and national contexts, and very large corpora of printed material. The Beckett Digital Manuscript Project is the leading application of digital methods to Beckett's work. In this case the focus rests upon manuscript and pre-publication material rather than a published corpus, and although the BDMP offers new ways of seeing and understanding the larger contours of Beckett's writing career – the contents and annotative dimension of his personal library, for example – some of the most exciting and productive opportunities afforded by the project pertain to close reading of texts and close attention to their composition histories. In this sense Beckett's profile in the digital age accords closely with metaphors of mining, where texts, manuscripts, letters, and other materials are plumbed for their contents and their contexts, to explore how they combine into a larger intellectual and imaginative system. Such scholarly methods stimulate metaphors of geological stratification by squaring specific texts with their genetic archives. This study reads Beckett's late prose narratives as material expressions of his geological imagination, where attention to detailed matters of philology, etymology, stylistic change, and the progressive 'vaguening' of literary reference – including to his own earlier texts – shows how geological themes and images govern the relations of narrative subjects and objects, memory and inscription, bare life, and the agency of things.

Text mining takes two dominant forms in this study: firstly, a focus on the origin and provenance of particular words reveals a vocabulary of the 'underground', where words occurring at pivotal points in the texts of *Nohow On* turn

on geological or terranean points of origin; secondly, the texts of *Nohow On* are mined with attention to how they engage in literary reference, as well as their strategic citation of Beckett's earlier works. Beckett's processes of allusion are famously vague, prone to descriptions of erosion, sedimentation, fossilization, and other metaphors implicated in matters of mining and archaeology. The question of how close reading and 'deep' etymological analysis might intersect with digital methods is worth careful consideration.

Beckett Studies has led the so-called 'documentary turn' in Modernism Studies, due in no small part to James Knowlson's 1996 biography *Damned to Fame*, which provided an enormous range of information concerning Beckett's working methods, as well as the condition and status of his pre-publication archive. Genetic studies of a number of texts (Krance, 1993; Krance, 1996; Hisgen and van der Weel, 1998; O'Reilly, 2001) have demonstrated how these working methods actively constitute the way matters of vocabulary, self-citation, and intertextual references operate at or partially beneath the surface of the text. The publication of Beckett's four-volume *Selected Letters* and numerous editions of draft stories, early notebooks, and caches of working notes has opened the archive to a greater extent and to a wider field of scholarship and readership than is the case with almost any other author. This generational shift in Beckett Studies has placed renewed emphasis on the status of the so-called 'grey canon'. Metaphors of mining, sifting, literary and documentary strata, examination of tailings, deciphering worn archaeological shards, and interpreting the presence of 'fossils' often arise when describing the ways in which scholarship and editorial labour have been enriched by access to these resources. There is not sufficient space in the present study to elaborate all the methodological and conceptual enrichments of the documentary turn in Beckett Studies. But a critical evaluation of the ways geological and lithic concepts are deployed in Beckett's texts suggests rich potential avenues for future research in their resonances with current scholarly practices and theoretical formations.

The Scottish sculptor Andy Goldworthy's observation, 'A stone is ingrained with geological and historical memories' (quoted in Long, 2016, 139), captures the essence of Beckett's geological imagination from the viewpoint of an artistic practitioner working with stone and discovering a rich inanimate life. The stone has memories: it is an extension of the sculptor's arm and chisel. Stone informs the narrator's apprehension of landscape, distributed identity, and history. Beckett's stones appear in fields, unmediated, or as standing stones that register the depth of human history. They draw in his protagonists, whether by forces of narrative magnetism or gravity, and they present an inanimate face to the visage of the observer. His stones address the reader too, enjoining us to hear the



echoes and resonances from history and literature: the Tarpeian Rock, a cliff located on the Capitoline Hill in Rome; the Rock of Peter upon which the Christian Church was founded; the gravestones (historical and anonymous) in the graveyards of Christendom and the fields of pagany; the Colossi of Memnon, guardians of the tomb of Amenhotep III in Thebes; and even the remnant feet of Ozymandias, jutting out from the desert of bare narrative landscape to suggest hidden antiquities beneath the surface. Beckett's protagonists imagine themselves as stone, engineer ways of measuring their identities with them, or find them useful (or painful) instruments of violence. There is little sculpting of stone in Beckett's texts, but the excavatory spirit arises in the presence of mud or in the suggestion of literary quotation. Texts are given the status of ground as much as the earthworks Beckett's narrators and characters discover, and the act of narration often gives rise to fantasias of epigraphy – such as the figure in *Molloy* gazing upon the landscape 'as if to engrave the landmarks on his memory' (*MY* 6) – as though inscribing one's name in stone secures otherwise intangible aspects of character and identity. Beckett's stones are nearly everywhere, worked by narration as often as by prior hands, passed down through landscapes, history, and literature, and always measuring the bodies and minds of his own people.

### 1 'Saxa Loquuntur!'

Imagine that an explorer arrives in a little-known region where his interest is aroused by an expanse of ruins, with remains of walls, fragments of columns, and tablets with half-effaced and unreadable inscriptions. He may content himself with inspecting what lies exposed to view, with questioning the inhabitants – perhaps semi-barbaric people – who live in the vicinity, about what tradition tells them of the history and meaning of these archaeological remains, and with noting down what they tell him – and he may then proceed on his journey. But he may act differently. He may have brought picks, shovels and spades with him, and he may set the inhabitants to work with these implements. Together with them he may start upon the ruins, clear away the rubbish, and, beginning from the visible remains, uncover what is buried. If his work is crowned with success, the discoveries are self-explanatory; the ruined walls are part of the ramparts of a palace or a treasure-house; the fragments of columns can be filled out into a temple; the numerous inscriptions, which, by good luck, may be bilingual, reveal an alphabet and a language, and, when they have been deciphered and translated, yield undreamed-of information about the events of the remote past, to commemorate which the monuments were built. *Saxa loquuntur*.

(Freud, 1962, 189; quoted in Hake, 1993, 148)

Sigmund Freud published 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' in 1896, in the twilight of a century that had seen profound developments in archaeology: the method of

stratigraphy and its illumination of the earth's deep time; scientific dating of exhumed objects; and transformative excavations such as Heinrich Schliemann's at Troy from 1871 and Mycenae in 1876, and Arthur Evans's Minoan discoveries at Knossos, Crete, from 1900. Freud deploys archaeological metaphors for the depths of the human mind, particularly the unconscious, shaped by the earliest experiences and buried beneath the regular workings of memory. This association of rock, masonry, excavation, epigraphy, and deep time with the gradual revelation of the self by expert use of the tools of exhumation – the patient as quarry – bore profound effects on the discipline of psychoanalysis in which Beckett became intimately knowledgeable at the time of his own analysis with Walter Bion at the Tavistock Clinic in 1934–5. Freud concludes his excavatory parable with the Latinized term for epigraphy or the study of ancient inscriptions (O'Donoghue, 2019, 42), but he leaves open the possibility that the stones speak in themselves as much as through any inscription they might bear. This phrase was likely taken from the burial plaque of Vienna's pre-eminent architect, Friedrich Schmidt (1825–91), who named the city's Rathaus *Saxa loquuntur* and adopted the phrase as his personal motto. Freud neatly brings together a series of themes and images in his parable of the human mind as a site of living excavation, each of which finds expression in Beckett's texts: ruins, earth, stones, buried objects, inscriptions, gravestones, and their (often partial) visibility and intelligibility. The sense of human consciousness as an ontogenetic process – one retrospectively understood across its various stages of development – is tempered by the deep histories of the human species, where, for example, breaking ground in tillage is fundamental for sedentary society. Evidence for such deep histories is found in the earth, in fields cleared of rock and trees, and in the stone monuments left behind. There is symmetry in Beckett turning an earthy vocabulary to identify and describe the human mind, as well as remnant inscriptions left behind, not least in those final epitaphs on the funeral *stelae* littering his texts.

As Freud's extended metaphor suggests, imagery concerned with archaeology, digging, and tilling the earth bears a provocative analogy to the excavations of the human mind, but embodied as textual matter it also suggests particular metatextual and hermeneutic themes. It draws attention to textual layers in the processes of composition, degrees of citation and allusion, and the relation of a text to a writer's oeuvre. It invokes specific practices of analytic excavation, whether close reading, etymological analysis, or the indexing of intertextual and reflexive modes of reference. An archaeological dig will be conducted on the basis of specific location choices in the knowledge that potentially significant finds may remain out of reach. Spatial metaphors of breadth and depth – the topographical range of the excavation as well as its