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# Cain's Burden: Trocchi and Beckett in Paris

**Paul Shanks**

Samuel Beckett and Alexander Trocchi crossed paths in Paris in 1952 when Trocchi was involved in the publication of the short-lived *Merlin* magazine. It was via *Merlin* that extracts from *Watt* and Beckett's French writings (composed between 1946 and 1950) first appeared in English.[1] Biographical accounts suggest that Trocchi subsequently became Beckett's protégé and that the two shared a close friendship.[2] Details of the relationship between Trocchi and Beckett, however, are patchy and the scant evidence has never been adequately assessed or substantiated. Andrew Murray Scott in *The Making of a Monster*, states that 'due to Samuel Beckett's death during the preparation of [the] book, the author has been unable to confirm the detail of their relationship but many remember meetings between Beckett and Trocchi at the apartment where Beckett lived with his fiancée'.[3] Biographic evidence suggests that had Scott managed to contact Beckett, he would not have been greatly forthcoming anyway (given the author's famous reticence to be interviewed). Certainly, Trocchi read and edited the proofs for the Collection Merlin publication of *Watt* and was involved in negotiating contracts for this novel and the English translation of *Molloy*. However, Beckett was far from pleased with the layout and careless errors in the edition of *Watt* and an exchange of letters indicates a cooling of relations with the 'Merlin juveniles'.[4] For all that, according to some accounts, Beckett continued to have fondness and regard for Trocchi and expressed an interest in his work.[5]

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[1] Extracts from *Watt* appeared in *Merlin*, 1 (1953), 118–26 and from *Molloy* in *Merlin*, 2 (1953), 88–103. The short story 'The End' appeared in *Merlin*, 2 (1954), 144–59. Collection Merlin first published *Watt* in 1953 in association with Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press.

[2] Andrew Murray Scott, *Alexander Trocchi: The Making of a Monster* (Edinburgh, 1991), 45, 79. See also Terry Southern's commentary on Trocchi in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life in Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi* (Edinburgh, 1997), 77.

[3] Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 45.

[4] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London, 1996), 396.

[5] '[Beckett] is a grand old man and most fond of you. You ought to write to him from time to time, as he expressed great interest in how you are getting on'. Terry Southern to Alexander Trocchi, 20 August 1958, quoted in Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 79.

The question as to the relationship between the two writers is not merely of biographical interest for there are some intriguing overlaps between Trocchi's fiction and Beckett's post-war writing. *Young Adam*, which was begun well before Trocchi met Beckett, and *Cain's Book* contain meditations on the nature of narrative and identity which, in places, verbally and syntactically echo the utterances of Beckett's indigents.[6] More importantly, both writers construct a literary landscape that depends on its distance (as well as its difference) from the perceived cultural limitations of the homeland. In Beckett's work, the geographic terrain derives (as biographical and manuscript studies have illustrated) from personal memories of Ireland. However, the removal of place names, the confabulation of specific locale and the use of a shifting and recursive narrative framework transforms the landscape into terra incognita.[7] In *Young Adam*, the Clyde and Lothian areas are seen from the vantage point of the canal that forms a conduit between both of them and this perspective accentuates the outsider status of the central protagonist. Although the novel refers to places that have a palpable reality in Scotland, the point of view and the narrative voice that Trocchi adopts shifts the landscape away from its recognisable cultural manifestations towards a more abstract and imaginary space. Likewise, in *Cain's Book*, memories of an earlier existence in Glasgow are juxtaposed with details of the narrator's life at the time of writing on a scow on the Hudson River: accounts of this former existence are distorted via the prism of drugs and the collation of past memories and present experience.

The context in which Beckett's *Trilogy* (comprised of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable*) and Trocchi's *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book* came into being is crucial for an understanding of these stylistic and thematic overlaps.[8] In the first instance, both writers found their literary identity via Europe and European art. The place that makes a difference for the development of these writers – and which allows for a writing that both liberates itself from yet manages to *re*present the country of origin – is Paris. According to Pascale Casanova:

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[6] Trocchi was initially unable to read Beckett's post-war publications because he lacked the necessary fluency in French. See Richard Seaver's biographical commentary in Campbell and Neil (eds), *A Life in Pieces*, 59.

[7] Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country* (Monkstown, 1986) details those parts of Ireland (particularly the landscape surrounding Dublin) that Beckett drew upon in creating his fictions.

[8] In discussing such parallels as 'overlaps', I draw upon Ray Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation, 1966–2000* (Oxford, 2002), 11, 32.

> Paris combined two sets of apparently antithetical properties, in a curious way bringing together all the historical conceptions of freedom. On the one hand, it symbolized the Revolution, the overthrow of the monarchy, the invention of the rights of man – an image that was to earn France its great reputation for tolerance toward foreigners and as a land of political asylum for refugees. But it was also the capital of letters, the arts, luxurious living, and fashion. Paris was therefore at once the intellectual capital of the world, the arbiter of good taste, and (at least in the mythological account that later circulated the entire world) the source of political democracy; an idealized city where artistic freedom could be proclaimed and lived.[9]

There was then a shared feeling amongst expatriate artists that Paris, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, was a place in which it was possible to work without the constraints of aesthetic and cultural censorship: 'Paris … became the capital of those who proclaimed themselves to be stateless and above political laws: in a word, artists'.[10] Beckett and Trocchi found in this new locale the freedom to create an Irish and Scottish aesthetic which could also absorb the currents of European art and literature.

Casanova's recent study of trans-national literary space offers a useful framework through which to understand how writers from smaller nations may forge their literary identity in relation to an established literary centre. According to Casanova, the study of literature has too often been based 'along national lines' which have tended to obscure trans-national currents that serve to shape and transform literary space.[11] In her study of world literatures, Casanova identifies an autonomous locale, The World Republic of Letters, where cultures build up literary capital over time. She argues that 'one of the essential stages in the accumulation of national literary resources consists in the construction of a literary capital – a symbolic central bank, as it were, a place where literary credit is concentrated'.[12] In this sense, it is possible for writers from (sometimes) smaller cultures to invest in this 'symbolic central bank' in order for their work to gain recognition and prestige. Such a process often involves an act of translation; more radically,

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[9] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge and London, 2004), 24.

[10] Ibid., 29.

[11] Ibid., ix.

[12] Ibid., 245.

it may involve linguistic and cultural reconstitution within the adopted domicile.

Casanova claims that Paris, both as it has been realised in literature and in its concrete reality, becomes a domicile in which the production and consolidation of literary capital is able to take place: 'the cities where literary resources are concentrated, where they accumulate, become places where belief is incarnated, centers of credit, as it were … The existence of a literary center is … twofold: it exists both in the imaginations of those who inhabit it and in the reality of the measurable effects it produces'.[13] Paradoxically, it is also in these literary centres that writers may gain the freedom to represent their own more marginal cultures: 'some writers are prepared to leave their country and take up residence abroad in a literary capital in the name of denationalizing literature, of rejecting the systematic appropriation of literature for national purposes – a characteristic strategy of small nations in the process of defining themselves or in danger of intellectual absorption by a larger nation'.[14] This is precisely the path that Beckett and his literary forebear James Joyce took in order to forge an aesthetic which, while often referring to Ireland as a point of origin, refused to be assimilated within the emergent narratives of nationhood that came into being both before and after independence.

Although Beckett and Joyce can both be considered as writers whose work resists absorption within an English literary tradition, it is also the case that, by choosing to settle in Europe, they were able to forge a critique of Ireland's cultural and political institutions. In *Ulysses*, for instance, part of Joyce's polemic was aimed at what he perceived as the emerging hegemony of Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church[15] as much as it was an attempt to subvert the conventions of the 'traditional' Realist novel.[16] Indeed, however much Joyce has become an overburdening presence in Irish literature,[17] it is important to realise that his texts, particularly *Ulysses*, were engaged in defusing the idea of any unified 'type' of national identity.[18] Likewise, the indeterminacies of Beckett's writing have been interpreted as

[13] Ibid., 23–4.

[14] Ibid., 314.

[15] G.J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival* (London, 1979), 154–8. See also David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin, 1994), 100–10.

[16] See Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (Princeton, 1981).

[17] Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland*, 25–7.

[18] See Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, 100–10.

gestures of non-integration following the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922.[19]

Trocchi's decision to move to Paris emerged from disenchantment with English attitudes towards continental philosophy: 'I went to France, not London, from Scotland. I found the English attitude towards existentialism – French existentialism in particular – unsympathetic after the war'.[20] He was additionally dissatisfied with what he saw as Scotland's 'provincialism' (an outlook that he came to articulate in an infamous tussle with Hugh MacDiarmid). Paris for the young Trocchi had 'that kind of atmosphere, that kind of situation, full of diversities, of contrasts, of new possibilities, in which the creative intelligence can produce its works, in which the critical spirit can live'.[21]

It was in Paris that Beckett realised his ambition to become a writer, although it took a few false starts before he found his own distinctive path. One reason for his decision to become a permanent expatriate is suggested in an exchange with Martin Esslin when he was asked 'why he lived in Paris and if he had anything against Ireland': '"Oh no. I'm a fervent patriot and republican," Beckett replied with, admittedly, a possible degree of overstatement. "Well", Esslin queried, "why do you live in Paris then?" To which Beckett answered: "Well, you know, if I were in Dublin I would just be sitting around in a pub."'[22] This throwaway remark masks the resentment that Beckett felt towards the moral censoriousness, the sexual repression and what he saw as the philistine nature of post-revolution Ireland. As Beckett's cousin remarked, 'living in Ireland was confinement for Sam … He could not swim in the Irish literary scene or in Free State politics the way W.B. Yeats did'.[23] Beckett also frequently found return to Ireland painful; in fact, the return home would frequently cause him to suffer a number of psychosomatic ailments (including palpitations and eruptions of boils). In contrast, the city of Paris with its 'larger horizon, offered the freedom of comparative anonymity';[24] the place may also have given Beckett the cultural and aesthetic parameters by which artistic works

[19] As Lloyd has argued, Beckett's writing, albeit indirectly, is aimed against 'the inauthenticity enforced upon the colonized subject, and … upon all those subjected to a globalized capitalism whose mechanism is a perpetual decoding and recoding of ideological identifications'. Ibid., 55.

[20] Quoted in Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 33.

[21] Quoted in ibid., 34.

[22] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London, 1997), 265.

[23] Quoted in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 274.

[24] Ibid., 274.

could be realised that stemmed from the more radical strands of European Modernism.

Beckett's poetry and fictional writings of the 1930s contain many signs and clues as to the direction of the later texts, such as the use of a self-reflexive narrative voice, the preoccupation with impotence, and a fixation with the failure of language and novelistic discourse to encompass the subject that it seeks to represent. His aim, even at this early stage, was to realise the literary equivalent of 'the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony'.[25] However, before *Murphy* Beckett's writing wilts beneath the show-offy erudition ('a procella raged in his sweetbread'),[26] the cryptic punning, fussiness and naval-gazing self-loathing of an artist struggling to find his voice. The first novel (unpublished in his lifetime), *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, is distinguished by a narrative style that is simultaneously recondite and undisciplined. Erudition and speculative thought lead to a verbal excess which relies on loose associationalism and subjective flights of grotesque fantasy to attain its effects. In some respects, this assay towards a novel demonstrates a writer who is not only trying too hard to be a modernist in the style of Joyce but who is barely able to write at all. As critics have claimed, Beckett needed to master his form before he could disrupt it. To some extent he achieved this with *Murphy* (first published in 1938), an urbane, witty and vexatious novel that avoids some of the formal (if not the verbal) excesses of *Dream* while also hinting at the darknesses made visible in the later work.

Beckett's writing in the 1930s is also distinguished by its persistent and scathing lampooning of Ireland. In 'Recent Irish Poetry', he denigrated those poets or 'antiquarians, delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods'.[27] His irreverence towards Irish culture is evinced in *Murphy* where the character Neary nearly gets arrested by a Civic Guard in the GPO for dashing his head against the buttocks of the Cuchulain Statue.[28] In *Dream* and *Murphy*, there are also unflattering caricatures of poets that don the role of Irish bard (such as Austin Clark who becomes Austin Ticklepenny in *Murphy*). However, amidst all of this debunking there is also a need to recreate the landscape of memory, as

[25] Samuel Beckett, 'German Letter of 1937' in *Disjecta*, trans. Martin Esslin (London, 1983), 172.

[26] Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (London, 1993), 61.

[27] Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry' in *Disjecta*, 70.

[28] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London, 1993), 28.

becomes apparent in the numerous vignettes of Dublin and County Wicklow.[29]

In making the decision to write in French, Beckett managed to achieve the necessary critical distance from his subject matter that was lacking in his early work. His reasons for switching to French after the war emerged from an ongoing dissatisfaction with the stylistic embellishments of English. In the famous German letter to Axel Kaun (dated 9 July 1937), Beckett stated that

> it is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman.[30]

The terms in which Beckett chose to posit these anxieties regarding language and the 'things' or absences to which language might refer can be traced back to Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 'Letter to Lord Chandos', one of the most iconic expressions of the European 'sprachkrise'.[31] In this sense, Beckett appears to be looking towards Europe for his literary models: this is evident in the choice of language through which he vents his frustrations (German) and his ridicule of 'official English' and bourgeois English culture (the reference to bathing costumes and the 'imperturbability of a true gentleman'). Beckett later opted to write in French because he felt that it was easier to write in this language without style (he had been influenced by the vernacular impetus of recent French writing, particularly Celine's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*).[32] In some

[29] In 'Fingal', Belacqua makes 'great play' of his 'short stay abroad' to the woman he is courting. Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks* (London, 1974), 24. However, this dialogue takes place from the vantage point of 'The Hill of Wolves' and the narrative descriptions of County Wicklow and its environs have a picturesque quality that serve to cast Belacqua's assertions in an ironic light.

[30] Beckett, 'German Letter of 1937' in *Disjecta*, 171.

[31] Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'A Letter' in *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings*, trans. Joel Rotenberg (New York, 2005), 117–28.

[32] These thoughts, however, can be detected as early as *Dream* where Belacqua reflects on the accomplishments of Racine and Malherb: 'Perhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want'. Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, 48. Cronin notes how, in 1939, Beckett read and enjoyed Sartre's *La Nausée* but was chiefly appreciative of Louis-Ferdinand Celine, whose most renowned work was *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, written in 'a colloquial, slangy first-person narrative with a vast range'. See Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, 307.

respects, he may be said to have freed himself from the encroachments of an English literary tradition (which he found stifling) and an equally inhibiting orthodoxy in Ireland.

Whereas in the early novels, recognisable Irish and English place names are given, in Beckett's later work, the countryside and the towns are rarely referred to by name. In numerous passages, the landscape of Ireland is transformed into an 'antichthon', a shadow world, in which fragments of memory reappear within the flow of the narrative as if within a dream or afterlife. At one point, the narrator of *Molloy* worries over his recollections of a canal bank and frets that he is conflating several different places: 'the canal goes through the town, I know I know, there are even two. But then these hedges, these fields. Don't torment yourself Molloy'.[33] In this passage, the reader may discern traces of Dublin (where there are indeed two canals) and the village of Foxrock where Beckett grew up. Critics have noted that, for Beckett, Ireland was both a site of personal memory and an 'empty space' which cannot be defined through historical and national narratives.[34] At one point in *The Unnameable* (the third novel of the *Trilogy*), the narrator recounts a voyage home following a 'world tour' made by a character called Mahood whose movement is facilitated by crutches (he has only one leg). The narrator abandons this story when it becomes foreign to him, when he becomes aware of it as mythology rather than personal recollection: 'enough of acting the infant who has been told so often how he was found under a cabbage that in the end he remembers the exact spot in the garden'.[35] As he ceases to believe in his story, the details gradually change: the world tour alluded to at the outset is refuted when the narrator claims that the journey in fact took place on an 'island', the one which he 'never left' and the spiral or arc of Mahood's movements detailed in the preceding account is exchanged for random and irregular movement.[36] It may be of significance that Beckett's narrators create a sequentially recurring diagram of activity which occasionally coincides with a national map. Perhaps

[33] Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnameable* (London, 1979), 26.

[34] According to Seamus Deane, 'time, in Beckett is a metaphysical problem' and 'it is not important to decide whether or not the landscape they [Beckett's protagonists] travel through is a version of the Irish landscape but it is useful to recognise that it has no historical presence and therefore does operate successfully as a site of absence, as a place many people have passed through without leaving a trace' (Seamus Deane, 'Joyce and Beckett', *Irish University Review*, 14 (1984), 64–5.

[35] Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy*, 297.

[36] Ibid., 300.

such maps are invoked merely to point up their contingency, as if, for a brief moment, the world might be reduced to an island which is also Ireland.

In Trocchi's *Young Adam*, the terrain is more immediately recognisable, although the towns encountered during the journeys between the Clyde and Leith are given fictional names (such as Clowes and Lairs, the latter denoting muddy ground as well as a cemetery). At one point during the trip to Leith, the company on the barge encounter a man whose decrepit appearance makes a disturbing impression: 'He was sitting on the grass verge, leaning forwards, his shoulders hunched, his chin on his chest. As we approached him he did not look up'.[37] Something of the inhumanity of the man's appearance unsettles Joe: 'Two white sticks, the shins unsocked, like a thin neck from a collar, thrust upwards from split boots'. He comments to Leslie that the man 'Might be dead just sitting there'.[38] It is only later that he manages to piece together the full significance of what he has seen and its connection with the female corpse that Leslie and Joe fished from the Clyde in the opening chapter:

> It wasn't a direct resemblance, but there was a connection somewhere with someone. Something vaguely familiar. I wasn't able to put my finger on it until later. The familiarity was the familiarity of limbs out of control, of something missing that should have been there, the absence of which, more telling than what remains, strikes at one deeply, almost personally, making one feel that one is face to face with the subhuman. The dead are like that, and the maimed, and the tramp was … He had come close then to my memory of the corpse in the water, which was only a movement of limbs, less rigid than his but in some unmistakable way the same.[39]

In this description, the man is entirely reduced to the status of object. Andrew Murray Scott is tempted to see in the passage an indirect allusion to Beckett, arguing that 'it is almost as if the character of "Molloy" himself' has been 'seen': in this sense, the vague familiarity of the 'tramp' becomes 'a private joke of Trocchi's, a planting of flags'.[40]

Scott may be alluding to a passage in Part 1 of *Molloy*: at this point in the narrative, Molloy has come to rest by a canal bank near the town he has

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[37] Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam* (London, 2003), 68.
[38] Ibid., 68–9.
[39] Ibid., 70–1.
[40] Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 96.

recently departed from. While there, he views an 'approaching barge' pulled by donkeys,

> so gently approaching that the water was unruffled. It was a cargo of nails and timber, on its way to some carpenter I suppose. My eyes caught a donkey's eyes, they fell to his little feet, their brave fastidious tread. The boatman rested his elbow on his knees, his head on his hand. He had a long white beard. Every three or four puffs, without taking his pipe from his mouth, he spat into the water. I could not see his eyes.[41]

The description has an iconic and biblical resonance which is very different in flavour from the passage in *Young Adam*. The whole scene also points towards an earlier time frame (as one may evince from the donkey drawn barge). However, what becomes apparent if one collates these superficially similar scenes is that, for the narrator of *Young Adam*, the figure of the tramp denotes an absence that cannot be articulated; the tramp is an empty shell, neither fully dead nor fully alive. In the passage from Beckett, however, it is the man in the barge who comes to embody an unfathomable and implacable authority: Molloy is unable to see his eyes. The narrator of *Molloy* also speaks through the mask of his indigent and the processes of mental and bodily disintegration that he recounts show awareness of the thresholds of being: 'it's coming, it's coming. I hear from here the howl resolving all, even if it is not mine. Meanwhile there's no use knowing you are gone, you are not, you are writhing yet, the hair is growing, the nails are growing, the entrails emptying, all the morticians are dead'.[42]

In his representation of Molloy, Beckett creates a dynamic between subject and object which resists the impasse denoted in Trocchi's novel. In an earlier passage, Molloy is arrested for loitering without his papers. On recalling his name, he is released from the cells where he has been kept in custody. While standing by the 'white wall of the barracks', he becomes preoccupied with his own shadow:

> A confused shadow was cast. It was I and my bicycle. I began to play, gesticulating, waving my hat, moving my bicycle to and fro before me, blowing the horn, watching the wall. They were watching me through the bars, I felt their eyes upon me. The policeman on guard at the door

[41] Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy*, 26.
[42] Ibid., 27.

> told me to go away. He needn't have, I was calm again … The man came towards me, angered by my slowness. Him too they were watching, through the windows. Somewhere someone laughed. Inside me too someone was laughing.[43]

The initial image of this shadow play recalls the antics of a slapstick comedian (Charlie Chaplin springs to mind) and it is uncertain whether Molloy's actions are disinterested and entirely self absorbed or whether he is conscious of an outside audience. When he becomes aware of being watched ('I felt their eyes upon me'), his play ceases. The ambiguity is heightened, however, when Molloy notes that the man who has asked him 'to go away' is also being watched. It is uncertain then, whether the ensuing laughter shared by at least a part of Molloy ('inside me too someone was laughing') is directed at Molloy himself or the man in question. If one goes with the latter reading, the whole scene comes to suggest a marked defiance on Molloy's part towards those who hold him under observation but this defiance is concealed; it emerges from some residue of the 'self' which refuses to be cowed by an external authority. There is then, a complex interplay between observer and observed in this passage; a two-way panopticism in which the boundaries between private and public perception interpenetrate one another. The fact that this is a two way process suggests that the very structures that constitute the individual may be mirrored and thereby offer a site of resistance. As Anna McMullan has recently argued, 'Beckett's oeuvre can be seen as a sustained critique or parody of that sovereign consciousness which seeks to see, know and record its objects. From his earliest writings, both fictional and critical, Beckett was concerned with the breakdown of the relation between self and world, or subject and its representable object: the "visible", "knowable" world'.[44] The fact that Molloy's hidden laughter cannot be fully categorised, and thereby 'known', enhances this sense of an identity that cannot be coerced by external modes of identification.

For Joe in *Young Adam*, however, there is no escape from the binary oppositions of subject and object. The frustration that this leads to is sometimes demarcated by the excess inherent in the writing itself, as in the incident where the narrator pours custard and other items over the prone body of his girlfriend. This is the one scene that Trocchi decided not to

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[43] Ibid., 26.

[44] Anna McMullan, 'Irish/Postcolonial Beckett' in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies* (London, 2004), 95–6.

excise from the 'dirty' version of the novel published by Olympia Press. The sheer excess of this scene prefigures the unspecified 'disintegration' that the narrator describes in the last sentence of the novel. A similar process can be detected later in the book when Joe confesses that the body discovered in the Clyde at the beginning of the narrative is, in fact, Cathie. The narrator ponders over the conclusion made by the police that she has been murdered. The use of hypothesis and provisional statements at this point in the text and the gentle cajoling of the reader, unmistakeably recalls the discourse of Beckett's prose works (particularly the novellas and *Trilogy*): 'what convinced them, I suppose, was the fact that she was wearing no clothes. That, they no doubt felt, indicated the presence of a man. At least one man. I'm with them there, of course. It's the kind of conclusion I might jump to myself. You too, perhaps'.[45] The narrator then proceeds to detail the events that lead to Cathie's accidental death. After Cathie vanishes into the Clyde, Joe scrupulously covers up his traces at the scene of the accident lest he find himself incriminated: the ensuing passage is interspersed with oblique and seemingly random references to Scottish culture.

The narrative voice in this section is dry and laconic and there is a disjunction between the idiom and the events recollected. At one point, Joe realises that he will need to dispose of Cathie's handbag: 'I had touched that, so there would be fingerprints on it. Elementary my dear'.[46] The allusion may remind the reader that the inventor of Sherlock Holmes was Edinburgh-born Arthur Conan Doyle (although, it must be added, that the phrase 'elementary, my dear Watson' did not become associated with Holmes through the books but rather from a stage adaptation). There is then an equally facetious quotation from Robert Burns's 'Red Red Rose': 'the bag would probably never be found – "till a' the seas gang dry … "'.[47] The well-known associations that this song has with undying love when coupled with Burns' precedence as Scotland's national poet gains in significance when the reader recalls Joe's earlier reflection on his predicament. Joe associates Cathie's death with that of his mother and sees himself as 'an alien, an exile, society already crystallizing against me'.[48] His status as an exile from his country appears to be tied in with a sense of abandonment from the feminine. Joe then throws away a potentially incriminating cigarette lighter into the river: 'I wiped it carefully with my handkerchief and hurled it as far as I

[45] Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 83.
[46] Ibid., 92.
[47] Ibid., 92.
[48] Ibid., 88.

could. I listened for the plop, thinking of St Mungo and the fish. Mouth open, fish'.[49] The well known tale of St Mungo and the fish (included in Glasgow's City Coat of Arms) concerns an act of infidelity. Queen Languoreth, wife of Hydderch Hael, King of Cadzow, lends her wedding ring to a lover. The king manages to retrieve the ring and throws it into the Clyde, challenging her (in one variant of the story) to return it within three days. Mungo finds the ring through the working of a miracle; he sends a monk to fish in the river and bring back his first catch; the ring is found inside the body of a caught salmon. The reference to the story of the salmon in *Young Adam* has cryptic implications in that it points towards the resurfacing of Cathie's body the following morning; miraculously, Joe is the first to see it while on the barge. The final quotation, made as Joe leaves the scene of Cathie's death, is from Shakespeare's 'Scottish Play': 'I found myself walking carefully to the shadow of the line of trucks, articulating without voice: "thou sure and firm-set earth, hear not my step … for fear the very stones … "'.[50] The reference to Macbeth's 'dagger' soliloquy may merely illustrate Joe's anxiety at being discovered but it also hints that he is not telling the whole truth. Later on in the novel, prior to the trial of Goon who is arrested for the murder, Joe sees 'the image of Cathie's naked body float[ing] before [him], like Macbeth's dagger'.[51]

The embedding of multiple quotations at this part of the narrative also emphasises the pre-constructed nature of Joe's recollections: 'I felt vaguely that the whole incident had taken place out of time, that there had been a break in continuity, that what happened was not part of my history. It was pervaded with the unreality of dream, fiction'.[52] Moving back from the events described, it is surely significant that Joe's loss of personal freedom is emphasised through multiple allusions to Scotland's literary inheritance. (Indeed, it is one of the few places in the novel where narratives pertaining to Scotland are referred to.) Trocchi is simultaneously acknowledging the locale of his fiction and forming a conscious distance from it: the quotations are elliptical and arbitrary; in becoming a form of literary shorthand, their gravitas is considerably weakened. Joe claims that he had 'merely to walk away' from the site of the accident to 'free' himself 'from an obsession' and the reader can perhaps infer a similar dismissal on the part of the

[49] Ibid., 93.
[50] Ibid., 94.
[51] Ibid., 146.
[52] Ibid., 93.

author.[53] A distinction is being made here between Scotland's earlier literary manifestations and the kind of fiction that Trocchi is writing. Trocchi's later remark that the most important work to come out of Scotland was written by him further illustrates this sense that he is breaking away from a parochial culture seen as limiting and insufficient for artistic growth. As Scott has argued, '[Trocchi] came to feel that he was not merely a Scot, he was the only Scot with a true sense of the value of Scottishness. His theme of being an exile within was an important direction for fiction'.[54]

In *Young Adam*, the narrator's ontological self-questioning can be seen in counterpart to Beckett's work. The narrator foregrounds the limitations of language in expressing identity and the disjunction between words and 'things'. The opening part of the book, in its investigation of the scission between past and present time, between the reflection of one's mirror image and the person that one is, owes some debt to Sartre's early writings (particularly *La Nausée*):

> I don't ask whether I am the 'I' who looked or the image that was seen, the man who acted or the man who thought about the act. For I know now that it is the structure of language itself that is treacherous. The problem comes into being as soon as I begin to use the word 'I'. There is no contradiction in things, only in the words we invent to refer to things. It is the word 'I' which is arbitrary and which contains within it its own inadequacy and its own contradiction.[55]

For all the uncertainties expressed here, there is a knowingness in the rhetoric and a clarity of purpose which in itself forms an affirmation of the forensic efficacy of language to state the ineffable. In the following paragraph, the narrator discerns 'somewhere from beyond the dark edge of the universe a hyena's laugh' which foregrounds the elusive nature of the reality that the speaker is trying to express.[56] However, the narrator's investigation of the first-person pronoun in the earlier paragraph has an assurance very different from Beckett. In the *Trilogy*, the sense of impotence that the speakers experience when faced with irresolvable dilemmas of being is stated more starkly. The inability of language to effectively capture being is often expressed in frenetic

[53] Ibid..
[54] Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 96.
[55] Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 8.
[56] Ibid, 8.

terms: 'I seem to speak, that's because he says I as if he were I'; 'it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name, for me, no pronoun for me'.[57]

Before his first two novels were finally published under his name, Trocchi, who became frustrated with the difficulty in finding an audience, wondered whether he ought to follow Beckett's example. In 1956 he wrote:

> No complete work had appeared under my own name anywhere. *Young Adam*, written in 1952, had been rejected by virtually every publisher in England, and the manuscript was growing daily yellower in the drawer of a publisher in New York. I had written what I knew to be the first of a new genre of book in the English language and … had for four years been editing the most discerning literary review in what I was beginning to think of as the same goddamn tongue: would I have to follow my friend Beckett's example, and take to writing in French?[58]

It is of some significance that Trocchi refers to Beckett as a fellow exile from the appreciation of an English readership (before his French works, Beckett struggled to get published in England) and that he contemplates, albeit facetiously, switching to French as Beckett did. The implication is that Trocchi would be able to reach a wider audience if he could master the language of his adopted domicile; it is as if his mother tongue was a barrier to his success given the kind of novels he was writing. Trocchi did eventually manage to publish *Young Adam* (and later, *Cain's Book*) and achieved a certain degree of critical success and notoriety. However, he subsequently found himself unable to produce another full-length work of fiction.

In *Cain's Book* and in the 'Insurrection' essay, Trocchi suggests abandoning genres like the novel and poetry.[59] In a television interview he stated that 'we mustn't consider ourselves as professional writers any longer, because that means to write novels, say, a novel as a fixed form, and it's become an economic form – it's got to be so long … a certain kind of thing – and the publisher requires another of the same, and that's how you make your living, so you tend to do it: in the same way there are chairs of literature, and there's a Shakespeare industry'.[60] However, it was about this time that

[57] Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy*, 371–2.

[58] Quoted in Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 66.

[59] Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book* (London, 1992), 59–60 and Andrew Murray Scott (ed.), *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader* (Edinburgh, 1991), 180-5.

[60] Quoted in Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 127. 'For centuries we in the West have been dominated by the Aristotelian impulse to classify. It is no doubt because conventional

Trocchi's imaginative writing was increasingly subsumed, as the preceding quotation indicates, by inflammatory polemic. This is an aspect of Trocchi's work that Richard Seaver identified early on when Trocchi was contributing editorial essays for the Merlin publications.[61] Arguably the polemical utterance in Trocchi's two novels gets in the way of the fiction: in *Young Adam*, there are frequent diatribes against the institutions of legality (thereby recalling the moral note sounded at the end of Camus' *L'étranger*) and in *Cain's Book* there are numerous passages in which the narrator speaks out against the drug laws in the United States.

Beckett, who certainly became an agitator for modernist experimentation in his early essays, became less vocal about his writing as he progressed. He had found a means via Joyce of moving beyond bald and polemical utterances. As W.J. McCormack has noted, there is a progressive move from *Murphy* onwards away from omniscience towards the idea of the limited, uncertain, perspective of an 'I' voice.[62] For Beckett, this nescient point of view becomes part of the compositional process. He once told Lawrence E. Harvey that 'I can't let my left hand know what my right hand is doing. There is a danger of rising up into rhetoric. Speak it even and pride comes. Words are a form of complacency'.[63] In order to fully comprehend the forces that enabled this transition in Beckett's writing it is necessary to identify the literary and cultural ethos that Beckett, perhaps unwittingly, absorbed. His reception as a writer and the reason that he continued to produce works of value up till the end of his life lay in a subliminal knowledge of the way that 'high' literature functions as an idea (or episteme, to borrow from Foucault and Derrida); despite the fact that he often chose to focus on impotence and dissolution, his work has both the self sufficiency, ambitiousness and radicalism of modernist art.

Trocchi appears to have experienced some dilemmas in the act of writing itself and these difficulties are outlined in *Cain's Book*. At one point, Joe Necchi

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classifications become part of prevailing economic structure that all real revolt is hastily fixed like a bright butterfly on a classificatory pin; the anti play, Godot, being from one point of view unanswerable, is with all speed acclaimed "best-play-of-the-year"; anti-literature is rendered innocuous by granting it a place in conventional histories of literature. The Shakespearean industry has little to do with Shakespeare'. Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 59–60.

[61] Seaver 'disagreed with the increasingly didactic tone of Trocchi's editorials'. Scott, *Alexander Trocchi*, 61.

[62] W.J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett* (Cork, 1994), 375–401.

[63] Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton, 1970), 249–50.

(Trocchi's fictional alter ego) states that 'the trouble with me … is that I look pruriently over my shoulder as I write and I'm all the time aware it's reality and not literature I'm engaged in'.[64] Joe's anxiety can be viewed according to Mikhail Bakhtin's 'word with a sideways glance' in which narrative utterances are nuanced by awareness of a potentially hostile audience.[65] Joe goes on to construct a pastiche of Beckett:

> I press the tabulator, to sluice away my uncertainty, and begin to type:
>
> > —An old man called Molloy or Malone walked across country. When he was tired he lay down and when it rained he decided to turn over and receive it on his back. The rain washed the name right out of him.
> >
> > It's a question of making an inventory …
>
> —*Cain's Book*: that was the title I chose years ago in Paris for my work in progress, in regress, my little voyage in the art of digression. It's a dead cert the frontal attack is obsolete.[66]

In this passage, Joe alludes to the section of *Malone Dies* where one of the narrator's creations, Macmann, lies prone then supine beneath a heavy shower of rain. Joe's subsequent claim that 'it's a question of making an inventory' also draws upon Malone's narrative (the latter makes plans to write up an inventory of his meagre possessions). In the final paragraph, Joe self-reflexively quotes the title of the novel we are reading and makes indirect references to Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* and Joyce's 'Work in Progress' along the way. What comes across forcefully here, however, is the extent to which this re-enactment of Beckett's *Trilogy* has led to a dead end. It is almost as if the character is unable, or unwilling, to assimilate the texts that he is embedding in his novel. Such features tend to heighten the tragic qualities of *Cain's Book*.

It is undoubtedly the case that the body of work Beckett produced was more substantial and, arguably, of more weight than that of the younger

[64] Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 23.

[65] In defining the former term, Bakhtin argues that 'this "sideward glance" manifests itself above all in two traits characteristic of the style: a certain halting quality to the speech, and its interruption by reservations'. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (London, 1984), 205.

[66] Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 232.

Trocchi. While this may not seem to be particularly worthy of comment, the cultural and aesthetic reasons why Trocchi's fiction was effectively nipped in the bud after he published his second novel are significant. Although it may be the case that Trocchi's difficulty in extending his work stemmed in part from long-term heroin addiction and his role as a spokesperson for several underground activist groups,[67] there are more profound cultural reasons for the difficulty he experienced in expanding the terrain uncovered in his first two novels. Trocchi, who embraced Parisian existentialism and the Beat writers of America, did not, like Beckett, have a figure like Joyce to fall back upon. While Beckett felt he had to move on from his association with the latter writer in order to form his own artistic credo, it is undoubtedly the case that the uncompromising aesthetic radicalism epitomised by Joycean Modernism left its mark on his subsequent work. Trocchi did not find any analogous Scottish literary figure or tradition to which he could look. His models were European and American.

It may also be the case that Scotland in the 1960s and 70s had not cleared the cultural and political ground that allowed writers like Joyce and Beckett to flourish in the earlier twentieth century (albeit outside Ireland). This becomes evident when one acknowledges the obstacles that Hugh MacDiarmid faced in his attempt to revivify Scottish literary traditions (to 'make it new') or when one regards the hollowness of Trocchi's assertion during the Edinburgh Writer's Conference in 1962 that the most 'interesting' writing to come out of Scotland in the last twenty years had been written by himself.[68] The famous clash between MacDiarmid and Trocchi at the conference is ironic for the reason that where both writers conjoined was in the sometimes didactic and polemical pronouncements they made in order to justify their aesthetic positions. Nevertheless, MacDiarmid had established a literary tradition and a line of precedents which would enable him to have more confidence as a writer. As Edwin Morgan perspicaciously suggests, 'whether Trocchi ever fully came to terms with his Scottish upbringing and early environment, in the sense in which Joyce and Beckett did in relation to Ireland, is arguable … Trocchi, desperate to deparochialise, was swept into the new internationalism of the later 1950s and the 1960s, especially on its French-American axis, and it may be that decisions

[67] Critics and biographers have argued that Trocchi's involvement in Situationism and Sigma may have served as a distraction from the business of writing.

[68] Trocchi's exchanges with MacDiarmid and David Daiches at The Edinburgh International Writer's Conference are reproduced in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life in Pieces* (Edinburgh, 1997), 154–7.

made too quickly at that time caused his difficulties in assimilating and using his own past'.[69] Although Alasdair Gray and James Kelman have denied that they embody a Scottish literary 'renaissance', it is certainly the case that their work helped create a series of traditions and precedents which would give later Scottish writers a stronger feeling of self confidence.[70]

With this in mind it becomes necessary to return to Casanova's remarks about the ability of less established cultures to forge a properly trans-national writing within the context of a more reputed literary capital. Broadly speaking, it can be claimed that Beckett and Trocchi had the same opportunities before them and both chose Paris as a centre in which aesthetic freedom might be realised. However, for Beckett there was an Irish literary tradition to react against as well as an exemplar in Joyce. Trocchi's attempt to create a trans-national existential novel was both a success and a failure in that there was no way to move on from the impasse that he experienced after writing it. Glaswegian author Archie Hind experienced similar problems in the 1960s. His first novel, *The Dear Green Place*, was, like *Cain's Book*, about the difficulties in fictionalising one's life and culture; like Trocchi, Hind attempted to forge a literary identity in relation to some of the more significant movements in European literature (the most discernible model here is Thomas Mann). However, after publishing one of the greatest Glasgow novels ever written he was never able to complete another work.

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[69] Edwin Morgan, 'Alexander Trocchi: A Survey' in ibid., 279. The essay first appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, 70 (1985), 48–58.

[70] 'What seems to be self evident [in contemporary Scottish writing] is that there's a much more self-confident use of language. As a kind of very general point, amongst younger writers there's a greater freedom of language than there may have been, let's say forty or fifty years ago…. At that time… the Scottish voice would always be in the dialogue and never form a nationality in itself. That's a crucial problem, and it doesn't apply just to contemporary Scottish literature.' James Kelman, quoted in Tom Toremans, 'An Interview with Alasdair Grey and James Kelman', *Contemporary Literature*, 44 (2003), 564–86.