

Samuel Beckett's student library in Watt

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SAMUEL BECKETT'S STUDENT YEARS at Trinity College Dublin (1923-1927) marked the first important period of exposure to a corpus of texts later to be integrated in his writing. The acquisition of large quantities of varied information that took place during this time would have a significant impact on his development as a writer. This paper makes use of the working concept of the student library as a subcategory of Beckett's library. The latter consists of the full list of the editions that have been preserved in his apartment in Paris, in the International Foundation in Reading or in private collections such as Anne Atik's, along with a tentative list of authors, titles or specific editions he read or may have read, but of which no copy has survived. Apart from the clearly defined period of studies at TCD,² the student library would be enriched by the inclusion of the postgraduate years (1928-1931), in which Beckett conducted research in academic institutions while fulfilling other roles, most significantly those of lecturer and critic.

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The student library shows Beckett's engagement with writers, philosophers and critics from several linguistic backgrounds. Taken as a whole, it is more than just a list of titles that he was required to read as part of his education. The library is, in fact, the emblem of Beckett's education. In order to interpret it, I have taken into account the effect that this specific type of education had on him, with both the implicit advantages and the limitations. While generally thought of as enriching, information can also be perceived as invasive, intimidating, excessive and stifling, especially if it stems from a higher figure of authority.

Beckett's student library contributes to a discussion of the role of erudition in his fiction. There are three stages in Beckett's engagement with erudition and the accompanying corpuses. The first consists of the curriculum that Beckett was required to read in his undergraduate years. This corpus represents a significant and sustained contact with three literary traditions (English, French and Italian) that have shaped Beckett's development as a writer. The second stage consists of the knowledge Beckett acquired in the position of lecturer. In this phase, Beckett's reading habits are more clearly determined by personal preferences and by assignments to write works of criticism or to teach. The "Racine and the modern novel" lectures he gave at TCD in 1930 and 1931 will have the biggest impact on his writing career. Thus, they serve as a highly significant resource to analyse Beckett's novels from the perspective of his reading within academia.

Finally, in the third and longest stage, Beckett returns and responds to his readings in academia throughout his novelistic career. The continuous recourse to, and engagement with, the knowledge he acquired through education constitutes an underlying aspect of his writing and of his developing aesthetics. The novel genre in Beckett's oeuvre is connected to the idea of formation as development, which points directly to the *Bildungsroman*. Beckett's own academic *Bildung* began at TCD and continued into his lectureship years, leaving behind the student library as a trace. His development as a writer contributed a new dimension to the

learning from his student years. Before he started composing *Watt*, he became acquainted with Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's encyclopaedic figure, Faust. Beckett recognized in Faust the emblem of formation, and because of this he adapted a crucial line uttered by the protagonist. The line "Die Erde hat mich wieder" ("the earth has me again"), marking the moment when Faust chooses to stay alive rather than commit suicide, is reworked into the *Watt* addenda as "Die Merde hat mich wieder".³

³ BECKETT, S. *Watt*, edited by Chris Ackerley. London: Faber & Faber, 2009a, p. 376.

The ambivalent perspective on erudition as represented by Faust returns in Beckett's final novel, *How it is*. The Erde-Merde continuum takes the form of the mud image that is prevalent in the novel: "past moments old dreams back again or fresh like those that pass or things things always and memories I say them as I hear them murmur them in the mud".⁴ The erudition gained through the process of formation is deflated here as mere unintelligible gurgling in the mud. Moreover, it is crucial to note that the two poles of education (the teacher and the student) are pictured in a sadomasochistic relationship. The character Pim is subjected to torture as part of his formation. Thus, the dissolution of the novel conventions takes place simultaneously with the effacement of the traces left by education. In this sense, Beckett placed significant importance on the *Bildungsroman* as the model for the structure of his novels. But before he could start to efface the traces of his education there had to be a *Bildung* first, which can, to some extent, be reconstructed by means of the reading traces in Beckett's student library. In what follows, I shall present the manner in which Beckett drew to the student library and to erudition in general in his third novel, *Watt*.

⁴ BECKETT, S. *How it is*, edited by Édouard Magessa O'Reilly. London: Faber & Faber, 2012, p. 3.

After *Murphy* was published in 1938, Beckett did not immediately start working on his next novel. The composition process of *Watt* lasted from 1941 until 1944, while the novel was published much later in 1953. Beckett's methods after the completion of *Murphy* in 1936 are indebted to his changing manner of acquiring knowledge and relating to it. The inherent differences between the two novels consequently involve a shift in Beckett's use of the student library. More specifically, in order to analyse the perspective towards acquired knowledge in *Watt*, the focus needs to be shifted from the published text to the pre-composition phase. This includes the years during which Beckett engaged with German culture by travelling, learning the language and reading German literature. While the books he read in this period are not part of the student library, his reading did nevertheless shape the way in which the student library would surface in his writing. The titles that made the most impact on Beckett's view on erudition are Goethe's *Faust* and Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*.

The Faust notes

In the summer of 1936, before leaving for Germany, Beckett took notes from Goethe's *Faust*, at a time when he was trying to distance himself from Joyce's poetics. Dirk Van Hulle gives a detailed account of the entries in the context of Beckett's oeuvre, showing that Beckett's newfound manner of note-taking already reflects his intention of gaining more independence: compared to Joyce's entries in the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks, Beckett's notes are extensive and often transcribed verbatim.⁵

⁵ VAN HULLE, D. Samuel Beckett's *Faust* notes. *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 15, 2006, p. 284.

Heather Jackson regards the use of notebooks in order to preserve reading traces as a more autonomous practice than that of marginal comments.⁶ During Beckett's student years the notes he took on Italian authors from the reading lists at TCD consisted of biographies, detailed summaries and commentaries based on both primary texts and works of criticism. His increasing preference towards working with notebooks is during his close contact with Joyce between 1928 and 1930 in Paris. The writing process of *Dream of fair to middling women* was highly influenced by Joyce, as Beckett wrote to MacGreevy in August 1931 that he had become "soiled [...] with the old demon of notesnatching".⁷ After finishing *Dream* and moving to London, Beckett regularly visited the National Library and took extensive notes on the history of philosophy. The notebooks, which have been preserved at TCD, contain a thorough overview of various philosophical systems, from the Pre-Socratics until the nineteenth century. *Murphy* is to a great extent the product of the "Whoroscope" Notebook, in which the notesnatcher still prevails. Moving back to Paris in 1937, Beckett collaborated again with Joyce by taking notes for *Finnegans Wake*. In his personal work, however, he had distanced himself from Joyce's techniques. By that time Beckett had already turned into an abstractor by appropriating sources and consequently "dis-appropriating" them in the interest of his own poetics. This approach was the opposite of Joyce's decomposition and recombination strategy.⁸ Beckett's practice of transcribing into notebooks was, thus, synonymous to the process of becoming familiar with the material.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 285.

⁷ BECKETT, S. *Beckett's "Dream" Notebook*, edited by John Pilling. Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999, p. xiii.

⁸ VAN HULLE. Op. cit., 2006, p. 285.

In the broader picture of Beckett's oeuvre, the *Faust* notes reflect both his increasing preference towards using notebooks and the gradual autonomy from external sources. This translates into a re-evaluation of Beckett's relation to knowledge, whether old or newly acquired. The *Faust* notes were taken a year before Beckett's second collaboration with Joyce, but already illustrate the shift towards an approach typical of the abstractor. In his notebook he took down the second most famous quote from Goethe's masterpiece, "*Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint*".⁹ The figure of a spirit that always denies is relevant in the context of Beckett's gradual effacement of intertextuality. The *Faust* notes show the transition between the stance on knowledge in *Murphy* and that in *Watt*.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 289.

In August 1936, after reading the first half of *Faust I*, Beckett wrote to MacGreevy, disappointed to find "a surprising amount of irrelevance for the work of a lifetime".¹⁰ Beckett believed the reason to be the fact that Goethe "was the kind that couldn't bear to shorten anything".¹¹ This critique can easily be transferred to Joyce's encyclopaedic goals in *Finnegans Wake*. Facing the crisis of modernity, Joyce reacted with a type of modernist literature based on excess of knowledge.¹² In this respect, Joyce is the embodiment of the figure of Faust and his ambition to cultivate erudition. Beckett's countertendency towards a poetics of ignorance creates a link with Mephistopheles's critique of reason and science.¹³

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 286.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem, p. 291.

¹³ Ibidem.

However, Van Hulle draws attention to the risk of presenting Joyce and Beckett as the equivalents of the two characters in Goethe. In response to the writer's obligation to express, modernism encompasses both extreme expansion and extreme reduction. More importantly, both approaches show how expression within modernism is condemned to failure.¹⁴ Beckett

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 294.

personally identified and extracted this conclusion from Goethe's text in Mephistopheles's words: "Allwissend bin ich nicht, doch viel ist mir bewusst" ["Omniscient I am not, yet many things I know"].¹⁵ Beckett's motivation to go on while conscious of the inevitable failure is reflected in his reduction in the display of erudition starting with *Watt*.¹⁵ Ibidem.

The addenda in *Watt* contain a reworking of a quote from *Faust*. In Part 1, Faust intends to drink poison but hears the Easter bells and decides to abandon his plan. Upon making his choice in favour of life, Faust utters the phrase "Die Erde hat mich wieder" ("the Earth has me again").¹⁶ In the *Watt* addenda, Beckett turns this into the aforementioned quote "die Merde hat mich wieder". The change from "Erde" to "Merde" contains a statement on Beckett's recourse to intertextuality. The context of the addenda is associated with accumulation of excrement in the form of unnecessary writerly material. In this sense, the reference to Faust only serves to undermine the importance of external sources.¹⁶ ACKERLEY, C. J. *Obscure locks, simple keys: the annotated Watt*. Tallahassee: Florida State University, 2005, p.212.

Reading Fritz Mauthner

Beckett came in contact with Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* during his second collaboration with Joyce. For a long time it was thought that Beckett had read passages from Mauthner out loud to Joyce, helping him with preparations for *Finnegans Wake*. In reality Beckett was asked by Joyce to read the volumes himself.¹⁷ Beckett ended up engaging even deeper with the *Beiträge*, as he extracted a number of entries and included them in the "Whoroscope" Notebook. The length of the verbatim notes suggests Beckett did not own a copy at the time.¹⁸ Later, Beckett did acquire a copy of the *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*. However, it can only have come into Beckett's possession after 1954 when he wrote to the German translator Hans Naumann saying that he would have liked to re-read it after the collaboration with Joyce but that it was difficult to find a copy.¹⁹ Beckett preserved his heavily marked three-volume collection until the end of his life in his personal library.¹⁷ BEN-ZVI, L. in VAN HULLE, D. and NIXON, M. *Samuel Beckett's library*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 162.

The influence of Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* is one of the most relevant to Beckett Studies, equally important as Descartes or Geulincx. In her seminal article, Linda Ben-Zvi presents Mauthner's stance on language in the *Beiträge*. According to his philosophy, language encompasses many meanings, including knowledge. By "systematically denying [the] basic efficacy"²⁰ of language, Mauthner indirectly argues for the ultimate failure of knowledge. However, one cannot discuss the limitations of language by avoiding the medium of linguistic communication. To Ben-Zvi this is equivalent to "the possibility of using language to indict itself."²¹¹⁸ Ibidem.
¹⁹ Ibidem.

A similar argument can be made to explain Beckett's changing perspective on erudition. In his works, he resorts to knowledge in numerous ways, ranging from an encyclopaedic to a deliberately superficial use of allusions. After *Murphy*, Beckett revised his use of language as shown in the 1937 letter to Axel Kaun, as well as his relation to the knowledge he had acquired until then. Reading Mauthner at this point in his writing career coincided with his turn to not only linguistic scepticism, but also to a scepticism with regard to erudition. In *Watt*, Beckett's resort to intertextuality is diminished substantially in comparison to the previous novels. More importantly, when present allusions are treated less explicitly. Beckett deals in this manner
²⁰ BEN-ZVI, L. Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the limits of language. *PMLA*, 95, 1980, p. 183.
²¹ Ibidem.

with the problematic question of erudition without excluding the use of external sources.

The theme of complexity from the TCD lectures returns in *Watt*, this time through the filter of Fritz Mauthner's ideas and Beckett's creative reworking. From Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Beckett extracted the idea that the inner world is unknowable because there is no language to express it, since language is a system created only for external experiences. Reading Mauthner must have appealed to Beckett due to a number of aspects discussed in the TCD lectures. More precisely, it resonated with his own interpretation of the mind in Racine's plays, according to which the mind is a hermetic organ that cannot be accessed or explained.

Beckett's connection with the treatment of the mind includes the presentation in chapter 6 in *Murphy*: instead of the true picture of the "apparatus", the interest lies in "what it felt and pictured itself to be".²² *Watt* in his turn applies the dualism between the inner and the outer world: "For Watt's concern, deep as it appeared, was not after all with what the figure was, in reality, but with what the figure appeared to be, in reality. For since when were Watt's concerns with what things were in reality?".²³ Complexity is in this way linked to the fragmentation of mind also in *Watt*, as it is in Racine.

²² BECKETT, S. *Murphy*, edited by J.C.C. Mays. London: Faber & Faber, 2009a, p. 67.

²³ Beckett, S. Op. cit., 2009b, p. 196.

The approach to intertextuality in Watt

Beckett's close engagement with Goethe's and Mauthner's texts impacted on the use of erudition in *Watt*. Intertextuality becomes reduced in its degree of explicitness throughout the novel. This process is reflected in the occasional gaps in the text that were already present in the manuscript phase and were never filled in. This concept is thematized in the novel at a formal level but symbolically expresses Beckett's stance on knowledge. In the matter of Beckett's resort to the student library, silence becomes a technique in itself. One particular quote exemplifies how this matter is linked with Mauthner's linguistic scepticism:

[...] what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail.²⁴

²⁴ Ibidem, pp. 52-3.

Knowledge is seen as a burden and condemns the writing to failure. However, Beckett begins to come to terms with this inevitable risk by toning down the transparency of his references. Anthony Uhlmann claims that while the composition process still allows for allusions to be integrated into the text, the very act of referencing is questioned in *Watt's* addenda.²⁵ A footnote explains the motivation for the addenda as a final piece of the novel: "The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevent its incorporation".²⁶

²⁵ UHLMANN, A. *Samuel Beckett and the philosophical image*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 42.

Allusions in *Watt* surface more subtly than in Beckett's first novels. In comparison to the superior recourse to erudition one finds in *Dream* and the more nuanced irony of intertextuality in *Murphy*, "in *Watt* the heavy use of references which relate ideas to other texts or contexts (allusions, in short) is made to seem ridiculous".²⁷ The various permutations in the novel mark, in Uhlmann's view, Beckett's movement from a style that acknowledges the authority of a

²⁶ BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 2009b, p. 215.

²⁷ UHLMANN, A. Op. cit., 2006, p. 43.

reference in the interpretation of the text towards a “combinatorial logic”²⁸ that cultivates non-²⁸ relation by exhausting all possibilities. Watt’s increasing inability to resort to language in a satisfactory way is an effect of the non-relation paradigm that will remain a permanent trait for Beckett’s characters.²⁹ The tie between allusions and the proper name of their sources is in most cases severed. This indicates that, while Watt’s avatars clearly possessed knowledge at some point, memory plays an important part in eroding it.³⁰

Ignorance and the composition process

John Bolin draws attention to the *Watt* manuscripts to indicate Beckett’s revision of his engagement with the writing process.³¹ The novel paves the way towards Beckett’s post-war “art of ignorance” starting from the level of narration and moving to the fundamental issue of form. The composition of *Watt* differs from *Dream* and *Murphy* in that it does not intentionally rely on external sources or on a predetermined structure. By May 1942, Beckett had been writing without any structure in mind, resorting instead to “approaches to the novel and narration that he had used in the thirties” which he found were leading to a disorganized aesthetics.³² Bolin suggests that Beckett’s intentional evasion of structure is motivated by a struggle dating from as early as his student years. The image of irrationality, incoherence and madness that Beckett received from Gide’s essay on Dostoevsky expresses itself in his post-war poetics. Beckett’s path was marked by a tension between academic and artistic ambitions. This is visible not only in his career choice, but also in the conflicting “writerly personas” of his novels and essays in the 1930s. Bolin argues that the noticeable display of erudition still ties Beckett to a practice that is more inclined towards the figure of the critic than to that of the poet.³³ For Bolin, *Murphy* and *Belacqua* are two protagonists who “represent their author’s oppositional urge to explore ignorance, suffering, and [...] ‘folly’”.³⁴ Therefore, *Watt* is a testing ground for an escape from the division between the protagonist’s and the narrator’s interests.

Dream and *Murphy* were built on an extensive pre-writing phase that consisted of theoretical planning as well as taking notes from external sources. Bolin suggests that Beckett prioritized his academic abilities over the poetic, which led to a growing feeling of inauthenticity.³⁵ The 1937 letter to Kaun marks the climax of Beckett’s tension between the two opposing directions. In an unpublished letter to Mary Manning sent later in August 1937, Beckett begins to distinguish between “real consciousness” and “understanding”.³⁶

At this decisive point in his career, Beckett turns to a practice of self-reflection that translates into a new approach to note-taking. The *Clare-Street Notebook* of 1936 and the *German Diaries* of 1937 mark his movement “from erudition toward a poetics based more directly on the emotional dimension of the self”.³⁷ However, Beckett failed to maintain this practice and soon returned to a mode of note-taking for the project of a play on the life of Samuel Johnson that involved extensive research, as John Bolin mentions.³⁸ Moreover, during the same period from 1936 to 1939, he kept the well-known “Whoroscope” Notebook, which he filled with a variety of erudite notes. These range from the Dante notes that Beckett used to determine the structure of *Murphy* to the many excerpts from Mauthner’s *Kritik*. Dissatisfied with his work, Beckett admitted to have started composing *Watt* “as it came, without pre-established plan”,

³¹ BOLIN, J. *Beckett and the modern novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 62.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 63.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

³⁷ NIXON, M. apud BOLIN, J. Op. cit., 2013, p. 69.

³⁸ BOLIN, J. Op. cit., 2013, p. 69.

as Ackerley quotes in his introduction to the annotated *Watt*.³⁹ This would have a different impact on his engagement with knowledge, as references and allusions would be included spontaneously and in a less accurate form than with the support of notes. Significant in the matter of the shift from erudition to poetics, the *Watt* notebooks reveal a priority towards developing a narrative figure instead of a protagonist. In Bolin's view, this narrator "mimics Beckett's own concerns as a *writer*".⁴⁰ *Watt*'s meta-fictional approach enables the narrator to regard the writing process and the protagonist's development from an ironical viewpoint.

In an entry dated 5 May 1942, Notebook 3 reveals an approach towards the creative consciousness that is founded on the lack of interest in other works. Beckett shifts towards self-reflectivity in the "functionally hermetic"⁴¹ writing process. In calling the creative consciousness "obscure," along with its driving acts of reading and writing, Beckett underlines the idea that in order to attain artistic success one must renounce the primacy of critical consciousness or "understanding", as formulated in the above-mentioned letter to Manning. The last notebook crystallizes the direction in which Beckett's writing was heading: a new approach indebted both to Beckett's academic erudition and to his own personal creativity. The act of writing, thus, does not begin with a structure that is planned beforehand, but responds to previously acquired knowledge in real time as the writing advances.⁴² Without rejecting erudition completely, Beckett intends to "allow what had been written to interact with other elements in order to 'engender' a new situation".⁴³ In terms of narrative conventions, *Watt* makes use of several voices that obstruct the reader's ability to approach the novel without becoming confused.⁴⁴ The multiplicity of voices practiced by Beckett in *Watt* is reminiscent of the fragmented consciousness discussed in the TCD lectures. There is not just one overarching narrator steering the novel, but several speakers. Ackerley argues that the impression of inconsistency left by the narrative is due to Beckett's unsystematic writing process,⁴⁵ which included a switch from the "we" narrator of the first notebooks to the figure of Sam. Bolin claims that throughout the novel the focus shifts from Sam's perspective to that of a different, more playful narrator superior to Sam.⁴⁶

The tone of the addenda moreover makes it impossible to believe that Sam is the authority who wrote the entries.⁴⁷ The voice behind the notes leaves the impression of being incoherent, thereby entering a game with the reader which, while evocative of the display of erudition in *Dream*, "do[es] not encourage the reader to search outside of the work itself for keys".⁴⁸ Beckett gradually moves away from the scholarly approach to knowledge of his early career.

Scepticism of erudition

Watt tackles erudition from a general perspective on a number of occasions. Mrs Nixon calls *Watt* a "university man" on account of the fact that "he is to be seen in the streets, walking about. But one does not see him often".⁴⁹ As with the romantic image of the student sunk in reflection that is present in *Murphy*, here the cliché targets the academic profession itself.

The reading habits of Mr Case are shown to prove his "very superior taste in books, for a signal-man".⁵⁰ The intention here, stressed by the incorrect use of double superlative, is ironical. The narrator makes further comments on Mr Case's affected posture, "his head flung

back, held this book out at arm's length",⁵¹ while reading George Russell's (A.E.) *Songs by the way*. The act of reading is for Mr Case an opportunity to "while away the time, and at the same time improve his mind", the order showing that erudition is not the main motivation. ⁵¹ Ibidem.

Another quote deals with the reading activity of Mr Spiro. In giving an answer to the matter of the rat eating a consecrated wafer, Mr Spiro begins "quoting from Saint Bonaventura, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, Sanchez, Suarez, Henno, Soto, Diana, Concina and Dens, for he was a man of leisure".⁵² The enumeration of these figures, obscure for the ordinary reader, contrasts with the claim that Mr Spiro would read such books in his free time. These examples express the wariness that is linked to erudition and ambitious reading habits. While *Watt* rarely deals with proper names directly, in these cases the names only serve to add weight to the text in a way that points to the irony of displaying one's acquired knowledge. ⁵² Ibidem, p. 22.

Two quotes explicitly illustrate that the view on erudition in *Watt* can be attributed to the character Arsene. In the first, Arsene draws attention to his learned manner of talking that is in unexpected contrast with his status:

Or is there a coming that is not a coming to, a going that is not a going from, a shadow that is not the shadow of purpose, or not? For what is this shadow of the going in which we come, this shadow of the coming in which we go, this shadow of the coming and the going in which we wait, if not the shadow of purpose, of the purpose that budding withers, that withering buds, whose blooming is a budding withering? I speak well, do I not, for a man in my situation?⁵³

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 215.

The final question deals with the versatility of the characters in *Watt* and the apparent incoherence of voices. Moreover, it serves to underline the superficial and ultimately empty show of pompous language. The listener is thus tricked into believing the discourse to be based on deep reflection, while the surface only serves to conceal a lack of content.

The second quote addresses the futility behind learning:

Not that I have told you all I know, for I have not, being now a good-natured man, and of good will what is more, and indulgent towards the dreams of middle age, which were my dreams [...]. Why even I myself, strolling all alone in some hard earned suspension of labour in this charming garden, have tried and tried to formulate this delicious haw! and I may add quite useless wisdom so dearly won, and with which I am so to speak from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet imbued, so that I neither eat nor drink nor breathe in and out nor do my doodles but more sagaciously than before.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibidem, pp. 218-9.

Arsene draws attention to the false advantage of erudition. The acquisition of knowledge represents a burden, which contravenes Beckett's previous stance expressed in *Dream* and *Murphy*, where wisdom is overtly exhibited for its contribution to the weight of the novel, be it presented in a straightforward or an ironical manner.

Beckett's distancing from the type of explicit, albeit ironical, allusions can be illustrated through a number of examples from the student library. While these names are less prominent than in *Dream* and *Murphy*, Beckett at no point severs his ties to the knowledge he acquired early on as a student. Rather, the manner in which this relation evolves follows the general tendency of his changing style as a writer. Consequently, one can still find many names from the student library in the subtext of *Watt*, while the surface only indicates a dramatic reduction of intertextuality.

The student library in Watt

Ackerley's *Obscure locks, simple keys: the annotated Watt* serves to identify the authors referred to in the novel that date from Beckett's student years and to interpret their influence. The following figures will be singled out for discussion in order to prove Beckett's continuous yet changing engagement with the student library: J. B. Bouvier, Dante, Descartes, Pierre Garnier, Joyce, Schopenhauer, and Shakespeare. Although Ackerley mentions other names as well, among which Saint Augustine, Robert Burton, Diderot, Dean Ralph Inge, Max Nordau, Proust, and Thomas à Kempis, they only account for minor and specific references or simply serve in the annotation to interpret the primary text. The first list of authors, by contrast, is more explicitly incorporated in *Watt* and serves to describe Beckett's show of erudition in this novel.

J. B. Bouvier

Beckett's use of J. B. Bouvier's *Dissertatio in Sextum Decalogi Praeceptum et Supplementum ad Tractatum de Matrimonio* dates back to his note-snatching days in the summer of 1931 for the "Dream" Notebook. Bouvier discusses the three kinds of chastity – "conjugal, vidual, virginal"⁵⁵ – and the types of "luxuria" (lust) that present a moral threat to chastity. Beckett's inclusion of the *Dissertatio* in *Murphy* hints at its contents that used to stimulate the protagonist during the nights as a student of theology.

⁵⁵ BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 1999, p. 60.

Van Hulle and Nixon identify a reference to Bouvier in the *Watt* addenda under entry number 17: "the foetal soul is full grown (Cangiamila's *Sacred embryology* and Pope Benedict XIV's *De synodo diocesana*, Bk. 7, Chap. 4, Sect. 6.)"⁵⁶ The entry reads as a bibliographical listing which, due to its scholarly nature, contrasts with the rest of the novel in which few references are marked explicitly, if at all. The corresponding passage in the *Dissertatio* deals with the theological problem in baptizing premature babies, including the matter "A quelle âge l'enfant est-il animé?"⁵⁷ In his answer, Bouvier resorts to the authority of Cangiamila, the author of *Embryologie sacrée*, who claimed that a foetus can already show signs of life as early as the age of 16 days old.⁵⁸ Cangiamila's authority is strengthened by a footnote alluding to the praise he received from Pope Benedict XIV in *De Synodo Diocesana*.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ VAN HULLE, D. and NIXON, M. Op. cit., 2013, p. 217.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 172.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

This example seemingly counters *Watt's* general tendency to reduce the explicit use of erudition. However, the effect here is not to reinforce the primacy of knowledge, but to treat it ironically. By approaching his source in such a dry academic manner, Beckett draws attention to the artificiality of the information, which almost seems out of place. The reference is, indeed, isolated from the rest of the novel due to its placement in the addenda and even as an entry it stands alone from the others. This indicates a reluctance to integrate information that is excessively scholarly in its form, confirming Beckett's stance on display of erudition in *Watt*.

Pierre Garnier

In *Dream* Beckett used Garnier through specific vocabulary that John Pilling traces back to the "Dream" Notebook. The "exuberance of coprolalia"⁶⁰ is thus linked to the "clitoridian (exuberance)" of entry 456.⁶¹ Belacqua's itching similarly stems from Garnier's medical term "prurit" quoted in the notebook⁶² and in the novel.⁶³ The term "casse-poitrinaire", designating "the active partner in male homosexual fellatio",⁶⁴ appears in Lucien's letter to Belacqua.⁶⁵

Despite being absent from *Murphy*, Garnier returns in *Watt* in a manner that is particular for Beckett's style starting with this novel. In this respect, Garnier offers a plausible source for Mr Gall in the historically real figure of Franz Joseph Gall. Ackerley cites Hugh Culik on the reference in Garnier's *Onanisme, seul et à deux sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences to "le célèbre phrénologiste Gall, en vertu de son ingénieux système des localisations de toutes les facultés dans la boîte crânienne"*.⁶⁶ Van Hulle and Nixon suggest that Beckett drew inspiration from *King Lear's* blind Earl of Gloucester and his son for the image of the "Galls father and son" in *Watt*.⁶⁷ The two are portrayed standing "arm in arm, in this way, because the father was blind", with "his son at his command, whose manner is all devotion".⁶⁸

While Beckett resorts to both Garnier and Shakespeare for the name of his character, the allusions are not made explicit in any way. Furthermore, the amount of knowledge that lies behind Beckett's use of the name fails to contribute depth to Mr Gall the piano-tuner. Beckett follows the same approach in adopting two names from Joyce's *Portrait* for Mr Hackett and Lady McCann in *Watt*.⁶⁹

Arthur Schopenhauer

Entry number 21 in the addenda reads "zitto! zitto! das nur das Publikum nichts merke!".⁷⁰ It does not belong to the *Watt* drafts, but is extracted from the "Whoroscope" Notebook where Beckett mentions a "conspiracy of silence against Schoper".⁷¹ Beckett's previous engagement with Schopenhauer dates back to his lectureship years around the time when he was writing *Proust* (1931). On 25 August 1930 Beckett wrote to MacGreevy about the chapter on music from *Die welt als wille und vorstellung* that he had just read and about his intention to read *Aphorismes de la sagesse*. Both titles appealed to Beckett for similar reasons: Proust had "certainly read" the former and admired the latter "for its originality and guarantee of wide reading".⁷² Beckett's interest in Schopenhauer is thus closely linked to his ambition to prepare *Proust* thoroughly, integrating his academic endeavours and skills in spite of the difficulties he experienced in the process.

⁶⁰ BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 1999, p. 7.

⁶¹ PILLING, J. *A companion to Dream of fair to middling women*. Tallahassee: Florida State University, 2004 p. 29.

⁶² BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 1999, p. 62.

⁶³ BECKETT, S. *Dream of fair to middling women*. Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1992, p. 19.

⁶⁴ PILLING, J. Op. cit., p. 53.

⁶⁵ BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 1992, p. 20.

⁶⁶ CULIK, H. apud ACKERLEY, C. J. Op. cit., 2005, p. 89.

⁶⁷ VAN HULLE, D. and NIXON, M. Op. cit., 2013, p. 30.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 9.

⁶⁹ ACKERLEY, C. J. Op. cit., 2005, p. 29.

⁷⁰ BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 2009b, p. 217.

⁷¹ ACKERLEY, C. J. Op. cit., 2005, p. 211.

⁷² BECKETT, S. *The letters of Samuel Beckett, vol. I, 1929-1940*, edited by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, I, p. 43.

It is interesting to note how Schopenhauer is not explicitly quoted or alluded to anywhere in *Watt*. In an ironic way, Beckett enacts the “conspiracy” to efface him from the text. The command proves not only efficient but also significant for the context of *Watt*. Beckett gradually moves from the referential style of his previous novels and of the preparations for *Watt* to a text that is far less direct from an intertextual point of view. Bolin connects Quin’s “Schopenhauerian drive toward abnegation” to the wish to escape into the third region, that of the void.⁷³ Beckett intentionally deals with these notions in a less systematic manner than his facetious display of erudition in *Dream*, in his goal not to deal “too seriously” with “the famous old ... ‘teaser’ apropos the suffering”.⁷⁴

⁷³ BOLIN, J. Op. cit., 2013, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

Moreover, the genesis of the entry contributes to the idea that Beckett’s works begin to be composed under the watch of an arranger,⁷⁵ a figure that makes its way more clearly into *Mercier et Camier*. This overarching authority is responsible for extracting a note from the “Whoroscope” Notebook that led to *Murphy* and inserting it directly in the *Watt* addenda, skipping the intermediate phases of the genesis. Beckett did later indicate in his Calder copy of *Watt*, used for the translation into French, that the reference here is to Schopenhauer. In the margin he adds, “Dies ist vergleicht [sic] ihre ganze Politik”, while at the bottom of the page he gives the source as chapter 4 in Schopenhauer’s *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde*.⁷⁶ Thus, while the entry itself suggests the need to conceal the source, Beckett later underlines the connection to Schopenhauer and the student library by extension, doing so in a scholarly way or leaving the impression of erudite intentions. This indicates the contrast between the novel’s tendency to avoid explicit references and Beckett’s inherent need to thematize erudition by pointing out his sources in later discourse.

⁷⁵ HAYMAN, 1982.

⁷⁶ ACKERLEY, C. J. Op. cit., 2005, p. 211.

Dante

Watt contains very few direct references to Dante. Previously, Beckett had incorporated his knowledge of Dante in the very essence of his own protagonist Belacqua in *Dream*. Murphy constructs a systematized fantasy of Belacqua that proves Beckett’s deep familiarity with the figure. However, in *Watt*, the recourse to Dante is dramatically reduced and, wherever present, made obscure. Beckett applies his new approach to erudition to such a strict extent that when the clear image of Belacqua arises at a certain point, he gives up the temptation to name him:

But the feeling of weakness, which he had been expecting for some time, was such, that he yielded to it, and settled himself on the edge of the path, with his hat pushed back, and his bags beside him, and his knees drawn up, and his arms on his knees, and his head on his arms.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 2009b, p. 26.

This quote shows that Beckett is not eager anymore to make an allusion evident at all costs as previously in *Dream* and *Murphy*, not even when it concerns his deep scholarly insight into Dante.

The following three examples illustrate specific references from the *Divina Commedia*. The most explicit allusion is the inscription at the entrance of Inferno in the third canto: “And the reason for that was perhaps this, that little by little Watt abandoned all hope, all fear, of ever

seeing Mr. Knott face to face”.⁷⁸ Ackerley includes it in his annotated version.⁷⁹ While one can read the phrase in passing without recognizing its source, from the perspective of Beckett’s knowledge of Dante it carries a heavy intertextual load.

Entry 18 from the addenda – “Sempiternal penumbra”⁸⁰ – is explained by Ackerley as “darkness with a beginning but no end”.⁸¹ He traces back the adjective to canto XXX of Dante’s *Paradise* that deals with “rosa sempiterna” or the infinite light of paradise. As opposed to the famous phrase from *Inferno*, the latter reference is extremely obscure even for the learned reader. Beckett, however, does not come to the reader’s aid with any explanation, but preserves the degree of opaqueness.

The last reference, “parole non ci appulcro”,⁸² inserted as entry 35 in the addenda, is taken from the seventh canto of *Inferno*. Ackerley cites Susan Senneff on identifying the passage in which Virgil comments on the corruption of the cardinals, saying he will not add any words to embellish his message.⁸³ Beckett included this entry in his “Whoroscope” Notebook before using it in the writing process for *Watt*.⁸⁴ Originally in Notebook 3, the context for this entry was a duet between Erskine and Watt. Later while preparing the translation into French for Calder, Beckett explicitly marked the reference in the margin as “Dante”.⁸⁵

The placement of the reference in the addenda is relevant for several reasons. First of all, the context of the addenda gives new meaning to the phrase, since one can read it as the storyteller’s resolution to reduce intertextuality (or its degree of explicitness). Considering Beckett’s compositional strategy for *Watt* as a shift from external sources towards a personal creative consciousness, the line from *Inferno* comes to strengthen this approach. Second, the entry tackles the question of erudition in an ironic manner. While the reference claims to limit the tendency of embellishing the text with more allusions, Beckett’s choice of language impedes the reader from understanding the meaning of the words. This creates an effect that deliberately stresses the idea that erudition is a shallow practice that, instead of challenging the reader, only manages to make the message more obscure. However, this is far from claiming that Beckett’s writing becomes clearer when erudition is concealed or reduced.

Concluding remarks

In connection to erudition, the concept of “logos” appears to be central to understanding Beckett’s aesthetics, as it stands for both “word” and “knowledge”. By the time he published his first novel, he had already read a significant number of works, of which a high percentage at university. The information acquired during his studies (as apprentice) and lectureships (as master) would form the basic material for his own literature in those early years.

During his years at TCD, he completed his required readings and accumulated information as was expected from any student who aimed for a successful academic career. But when he graduated in 1928, his relationship with that knowledge changed, resulting in a growing dissatisfaction with the way in which he made use of his education. In the course of these ten years he may have started to feel disillusioned with learning as the rigidity of the system contrasted with the actual need to resort to knowledge in real life or in one’s activity as a writer. Beckett’s turn to philosophy after 1932 was, in this respect, a significant incentive for his readjustment in terms of approach. *Dream* was a necessary first step in the “unwriting” of the student library.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 126.

⁷⁹ ACKERLEY, C. J. Op. cit., 2005, p. 143.

⁸⁰ BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 2009b, p. 217.

⁸¹ ACKERLEY, C. J. Op. cit., 2005, p. 211.

⁸² BECKETT, S. Op. cit., 2009b, p. 223.

⁸³ ACKERLEY, C. J. Op. cit., 2005, p. 216.

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

Writing *Dream* had probably already made Beckett realize that the density of references in the novel revealed the burden of learning he had been carrying since his student years. For this reason he may have given the approach another chance in *Murphy*, but failed because of the difficulties he faced in trying to unlearn what he had inherited. From *Watt* onwards his writing indeed becomes less and less encyclopaedic, to end in an extreme blurring of language and erudition visible in *How it is*.

In effect, Beckett incorporates references to his own version of the writers he has read, making recurrent allusions to the original texts, but also to his own previous uses of the texts, which leads to a complex interplay between exo- and endogenesis. In the theory of *critique génétique*, the first of the two concepts, coined by Raymonde Debray-Genette and explained by Pierre-Marc de Biasi, consists of the incorporation and assimilation of exterior information into the oeuvre, which is not to be confused with the study of sources (Lexicon of Scholarly Editing 2014). Endogenetics, by contrast, is the process concerned with the self-referential reworking of information “without recourse to outside documents or information, through simple reformulation or internal transformation” (Lexicon of Scholarly Editing 2014).

The incorporation and assimilation of an allusion, which at first occurrence was part of the exogenetic process, gradually shifts to the endogenesis of later texts and slowly becomes more autonomous. Beckett thus takes a distance from the context of the source, often makes this process thematic, and creates his own memory of sources by constantly reworking them within his novels, thereby partially effacing – and yet never quite or entirely severing the link with – the original context of his formation as a student and lecturer.

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