‘A Portrait of a Comic Martyr’—More Pricks Than Kicks

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I

It might as well be said that Samuel Beckett’s progress of creating work of fiction has been that of investigating minutely the essence of writing a novel. In his works the themes which develop logically, the law of causality, the concrete backgrounds, the clear-cut characters, and the omniscient narrators have been denied, the excess has been stripped off, and the language has been eroded. In the modern novel James Joyce was the most distinguished in the transfiguration of the narrative style. Beckett took up a novel at the point to which Joyce, heir of Flaubert, had brought it. Beckett is the heir of Joyce.\(^5\) Joyce’s interest in the agreement of form and content was also Beckett’s.

In his essay on Joyce (1929), Beckett says, ‘Here form is content, content is form—His writing is not about something; it is something itself.’\(^7\) The inseparability of form from content reappears in Beckett’s Proust (1931):

Thus he is less interested in what is said than in the way in which it is said—Style is more a question of vision than of technique—he makes no attempt to dissociate form and content. The one is a concretion of the other, the revelation of a world.\(^9\)

In spite of their similarity—the backgrounds, the intellectual tastes, and the stoic devotion to art, they are quite different from each other. Whereas Joyce was obsessed with pattern and completeness of pattern, Beckett is not. Or rather, Beckett’s concern with pattern is that with an incomplete one. Joyce added everything to his books encyclopaedically, while the substance of Beckett’s volumes has steadily decreased more and more toward the desolate of a naked consciousness. It is possible to say that ‘Beckett is an implosive imagination at odds with its own premises; Joyce gives us the feeling of infinity.’\(^4\)

Beckett is not concerned with universal truths. No meanings, no lessons, or no philosophical verities could be extracted from Beckett’s work. He offers us the featureless characters who move around like worms, devoid of great spirits that had characterized the former tragic art. It might not be improper to put Beckett near the nihilism—the basis of its literary assumption is that the ultimate essence of the universe is chaos, and the reality is nothing—of the surrealists he knew.\(^7\)

His view of art is summarized in a dialogue with Georges Duthuit (1949). He describes an artist as a being destined to ‘the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.’\(^9\) The phrase is similar to the last words in The Unnamable (1958): ‘You must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.’ In the essay he concludes that
to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world. That theme has been taken over succeedingly and developed by most of the Beckett characters. His art has been created in his deep depression.

Beckett's own method is reflected in his essay on Proust who, Beckett feels, is the nearest to him. Proust was concerned with the 'non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect...'. Beckett has also been interested in trying to find forms which express his vision. He says in the interview with Tom F. Driver, 'There will be a new form, and...this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else... To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.' Beckett is not interested in the constitution of plausible fiction but in non-logical statement of phenomena.

Modern people know that any old religious theory, materialism, or development of modern science cannot help them to solve the mystery of human existence. The victory of scientific technique, and the marvellous results brought by the application of the technological method have given birth to nihilism, meaninglessness of life, rather than extricating them from difficulties. Beckett has stared at the state of twentieth-century man, while he has deeply commited himself in the quality of language. As Hugh Kenner says, he is 'the clearest, most limpid, most disciplined joiner of words in English language today...and not the least of the pleasures he affords is the constant pleasure of startling expressive adequacy.' Martin Esslin insists on both Beckett's success of his literary creations and the importance of his work as human documents:

While Beckett's poems, prose narratives, and plays exist—and are highly successful—as mere literary creations, structures of verbal forms and images, they can, through their very uncompromising concentration on existential experience, also claim attention as human documents of great importance.

Beckett's work should ultimately lead to 'a search for the nature of reality.' It might be his peculiarly Irish faculty that gives his desolate vision a comic dimension.

In the following I would concretely disclose and discuss the world of Beckett in More Pricks Than Kicks (1934), his second fiction, concentrating on the hero Belacqua Shuah, who is a prototype for Beckett's later heroes.

II

More Pricks Than Kicks, Beckett's earliest fiction, consists of ten short stories linked with a central character, Belacqua Shuah. It deals with his career from his younger days to his death, so it is a sort of the picaresque. It is based on his unpublished Dream Fair To Middling Women (1932) written when he was wandering about Paris.

The title is derived from the words of Jesus to Saul in Acts 9:5: 'I am Jesus whom thou percecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' Pricks are at once martyrdom and sexuality, therefore they insist on hero's sexual impotence or feebleness and blasphemy, and 'the combination was sufficient to cause the book to be banned in Ireland.' Beckett's native country.

Belacqua is named after one of the characters in Dante's antepurgatory (Divina Comedia, Purgatorio, IV), where the spiritually indolent who delayed their repentance until the last possible moment are required to spend a period of time equal to that which they wasted while on earth. Dante's Belacqua crouches by the rock in an embryonic pose, which is to become the symbol of Beckett characters' desire to return to womb. Actually he was Dante's friend, Florentine lute maker, who was famous for his indolence and apathy. Shuah is named after the mother of Onan, first onanist in human history. Therefore Beckett's symbolism of name reminds us of Joyce's.
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The title and the hero’s name suggest sloth and apathy, impotence of mind and body, the menace from the world and the resistance against it, which comes to nothing, hope and its frustration, and the escape into the privacy and the revenge from the outside. The life of Belacqua is that of a martyr.

As the title of Le Misanthrope (1969–70), one of the Beckett’s latest books, shows, the locus after More Pricks Than Kicks has been the process toward deprivation, reduction, and impoverishment. There is an incomparable difference between the latest work and the eariest one, which is a pedantic introduction where rhetorical devices are excessively worked. However, tracing back the process of purge and negation to the root, we undeniably get to Belacqua Shuah. As Richard N. Coe says, ‘The ten stories of More Pricks Than Kicks are uneven in quality but they already bear to a remarkable degree the hallmarks of Beckett’s art.’

Beckett’s style is poetic, abundant in wit and power. Belacqua occasionally thinks about McCabe the assassin who is to be hanged. He prepares bread for sandwiches on the face of McCabe in the newspaper.

Now the long barrel-loaf came out of its biscuit-tin and had its end evened off on the face of McCabe. Two inexorable drives with the bread-saw and a pair of neat rounds of raw bread, the main elements of his meal, lay before him, awaiting his pleasure. The stump of the loaf went back into prison, the crumbs, as though there were no such thing as a sparrow in the wide world, were swept in a fever away, and the slices snatched up and carried to the grill (p. 11).

The act of cutting bread overlaps the image of McCabe’s hanging. The delineation of Belacqua’s bringing toasted rounds together is comical.

He clapped the toasted rounds together, he brought them smartly together like cymbals, they clave the one to the other on the viscid of Savora (p. 13).

The information that a murderer’s petition for mercy has been rejected and McCabe must be hanged becomes the better spice for his lunch. His pity for McCabe is found to be very superficial.

Belacqua takes lessons in Italian from Miss Ottenlenghi. They discuss Dante’s view of pity and damnation discursively. In this episode, ‘the moon-spots’ is...
another symbol of suffering, as is McCabe.

For the tiller of the field the thing was simple, he had it from his mother. The spots were Cain with his truss of thorns, dispossessed, cursed from the earth, fugitive and vagabond. The moon was that countenance fallen and branded, seared with the first stigma of God's pity, that \textit{an outcast might not die quickly}. It was a mix-up in the mind of the tiller, but that did not matter. It had been good enough for his mother, it was good enough for him (p. 12). (italics mine)

Moon-spots are not only physical phenomena but also symbolize the marks on Cain's forehead put on by God, which were important for Dante. Cain is a victim that is not allowed a quick death. God preferred an offering by the shepherd Abel to one by 'the tillers of the field.' Cain for no reason. Dante accepted justice of God's judgment beyond doubt, as he did Beatrice's explanation about moon-spots: 'She had it from God, therefore he could rely on its being accurate in every particular' (p. 9). And yet Belacqua feels difficult to understand it and compelled to protest to God and Dante. Eugene Webb says, 'This problem of the arbitrariness of the universe, choosing some for good fortune and some for disaster, is a recurrent motif in Beckett's works'\textsuperscript{193}. There exists a tacit similarity between the moon spots, the symbol of Cain's pains, and the existence of suffering on earth. This story has as its organizing principle 'the conflict between Dante's world view and the reality of the world Belacqua lives in'\textsuperscript{203}. However, Belacqua's sympathy for human suffering is not deep. The narrator is satirizing Belacqua, criticizing the old order or system.

The other symbol of suffering is a lobster for supper got at a fishmonger's. When Belacqua bought it, he didn't notice it was alive. Coming home and undoing the percel, he finds the lobster alive exposed \textit{cruci-form}\textsuperscript{22} on the oilcloth. He feels sick. His aunt points out his moral inconsistency.

"But it's not dead" protested Belacqua "you can't boil it like that."...

"Have sense" she said sharply, "lobsters are always boiled alive. They must be." She caught up the lobster and laid it on its back. It trembled. "They feel nothing" she said.

In the depths of the sea it had crept into the cruel pot. For hours, in the midst of its enemies, it had breathed secretly. It had survived the Frenchwoman's cat and his witless clutch. Now it was going alive into scalding water...

"You make a fuss" she said angrily "and upset me and then lash into it for your dinner."

She lifted the lobster clear of the table. It had about thirty seconds to live (p. 22).

Balacqua cannot give up the lobster, so he persuades himself that it will not feel, much pain.

Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all.

It is not (p. 22).

The narrator ridicules Belacqua who makes a fuss about a living lobster and satirizes him, because he does not reject God like Dante. His greatest talent seems to be self deception. The humour of 'Dante and Lobster,' as Yasunari Takahashi says, 'springs from a sense of radical disjunction between inner and outer reality, and this disjunction is undreamed of by a genteel sense of humour. It is this savage sense of absurdity which distinguishes More Pricks from other artist-novels\textsuperscript{22}.'

The motif of quick death reappears on Lucy's death, the death of a girl who is run over by a car on the street, and Belacqua's own death on the operating table. McCabe, Cain, and the lobster symbolize a quick death or the postponement of death that cannot be allowed a quick death, which would be man's fate. It is to become an important subject in Beckett's later works.

A peaceful day comes to an end with a small-scale vision of hell: '... together they (Belacqua and his aunt) went down into the bowels of the earth, into the kitchen in the basement.' (p. 21.)

In \textit{More Pricks Than Kicks}, it is striking that Be-
lacqua should be surrounded by a numerous number of women. Six stories focus on his relationship with women. His career might as well be said a struggle to escape from them, and marriage is a main martyrdom for him. Belacqua who is ‘sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence’ (p. 36) needs to avoid love or intercourse with women to defend his sloth. In spite of his brilliant career—he has three lovers and marries three times, he grotesquely keeps his impotence to the end.

In the story ‘Fingal,’ Belacqua goes hiking to the hill on the outskirts of Dublin with his girlfriend Winnie. In the end he leaves her, rides a bicycle he steals, and is found drinking in a public-house.

In ‘Love and Lethe,’ Belacqua is to commit suicide with his betrothed Ruby Tough on the hill in the suburbs. His motive to love her is to be assisted by her in committing suicide, since he cannot commit on his own bottom. In the midst of a drinking bout before committing, the revolver goes off. This is an anticlimax that frustrates our expectations of climax. Greatly astounded at the finger of God,’ they ‘came together in inevitable nuptial.’ The narrator moves away ‘on tiptoe from where they lie in the ling’ (p. 99). It is quite ironical that the result of trying to kill himself should be copulation Belacqua wishes to dodge. Moreover, it also resembles God’s cruel mercy that would not allow Cain to die quickly. Belacqua becomes a disguised Cain.

In ‘Walking Out,’ Belacqua hopes his fiancée Lucy to ‘take a cicisbeo.’ He feels that ‘she had rounded him up, she had cut him off, it was nearly as good as catching an ocean greyhound on the pictures’ (p. 105). When they are walking in the countryside, a limousine driven by a drunken lord strikes the jennet Lucy rides. While the jennet is killed instantly, Lucy ‘however was not so fortunate, being crippled for life and her beauty dreadfully marred’ (p. 110). Belacqua marries Lucy who lacks sexuality, as he has wished.

But tempus edax, for now he is happily married to Lucy and the question of cicisbeo does not arise. They sit up to all hours playing the gramophone, An die Musik is a great favourite with them both, he finds in her big eyes better worlds than this, they never allude to the old days when she had hopes of a place in the sun (p. 113).

Lucy dies two years later. Belacqua gets married again to Thelma Boggs in ‘What a Misfortune.’ Lucy’s death is a liberation for him. His cheerful appearance provokes amazement and discomfort among her acquaintances. It turns out that his pity is devoted to the abstract life.

Her death came therefore as a timely release and the widower, to the unutterable disgust of the deceased’s acquaintance, wore none of the proper appearances of grief. He could produce no tears on his own account, having as a young man exhausted that source of solace through overindulgence; nor was he sensible of the least need or inclination to do so on hers, his small stock of pity being devoted entirely to the living, by which is not meant this or that particular unfortunate, but the nameless multitude of the current quick life, we dare almost say, in the abstract (p. 114).

In this book Beckett omits hero’s psychology—how he comes to love and marry a girl: ‘…when he woke up one fine afternoon to find himself madly in love with a girl of substance—a divine frenzy, you understand, none of your lewd passions’ (p. 116). Their marriage also lacks sexuality. When the bride appears at the wedding ceremony, ‘Belacqua’s heart made a hopeless dash against the wall of the box…’ (p. 138).

In spite of the fact that Belacqua is a poet dowered with the love of love and chased by lots of women, his grotesque appearance and conduct arouse disgust and scorn. Beckett gives Belacqua plenty of equipments needed for a clownish hero. He is a pale fat man with impetigos on his face, with weak bladder and tendency to ptosis of viscera, wearing enormous glasses. His face is a dizey, platter face. Like later heroes—Watt, Molloy, Clov, etc., he has a spavined gait, his feet are in ruins. Perhaps they are outward
and visible signs of his inward and spiritual collapse.

A. Alvarez says:

Certainly, Belacqua's jerky and grotesque appearance matches his inner life, which is continually erupting into impotent because it is the fierceness of the self with the clogging ineptitude of the body.

At a party in 'A Wet Night,' he is described as 'something that a dog would bring in' or rather 'something, on reflection, he would not' (p. 78). He sits down on the end seat 'like a sack of potatoes.' At the wedding ceremony Belacqua the bridegroom wears a turned suit and fixes a purple tassel of Veronica in the wrong lapel. Since he has had scallions for lunch, most of the attendance are taken quite aback by the bridegroom's breath. The scene is presented comically.

Mrs. Boggs buried her face (poor little Thelma!) in the omphalodes, the Cleggs turned scarlet in unison, the Purefoys crowded into a shade, while Una was only restrained by her hatred of anything in the nature of sacrilege from spitting it out (pp. 137—138).

He makes a speech of acknowledgment 'in the white voice of which he was a master.' Thus he is depicted as a clownish antihero.

On a honeymoon trip Belacqua feels himself a martyr.

His eyes were parched, he closed them and saw, clearer than ever before, the mule, up to its knees in mire, and astride its back a beaver, flogging it with a wooden sword (p. 151).

In this paragraph he is likened to at once a mule and a beaver that floggs his testicles. Both of them suggest sexual impotence, Belacqua's attribute.

In 'Yellow' Belacqua undergoes an operation for the tumor on his neck and dies of heart failure. His widow (not Thelma but Smeraldina, the third wife) is to be a lover of Hairy, Belacqua's friend. The book ends in the grave scene with the narrator's comment 'So it goes in the world.'

As Hugh Kenner says, More Pricks Than Kicks is 'a typical story in its perverse refusal to observe any norms of behaviour storyreaders expect.' Beckett characters appear without logical connection and unlike those of Sartre or Camus, rarely know crucial moments of decision. The narrator explains Belacqua's gratuity of conduct.

For we assume the irresponsibility of Belacqua, his faculty for acting with insufficient motivation, to have been so far evinced in previous misadventures as to be no longer a matter for surprise. In respect of this apparent gratuity of conduct he may perhaps with some colour of justice be likened to the laws of nature. A mental home was the place for him (p. 89). (italics mine)

'Gratuity of conduct' is closely connected with Cartesian disjunction of mind and body, by which Beckett heroes are to be haunted. Beckett studied Descartes as a student and was influenced by him. According to Descarte's dualism, the true life is in the mind, which Belacqua aims at:

'...my heart's right there—the Portrane Lunatic Asylum' (p. 26).

'He (Belacqua) scoffed at the idea of a sequitur from his body to his mind' (p. 29).

On the other hand, the body to which mind is tied is a machine. Beckett decided to make 'perfect buffoons, or rather buffooning imperfects, of his men-machines or body-machines.' Spiritually Belacqua is a solipsist, Beckettian internus homo, which is to be developed into 'solipsism,' the theme of the next novel Murphy (1936). Belacqua is a prototype for Cartesian Centaur defined by Hugh Kenner—man on a bicycle. Of course Beckett does not agree with the ideas of Descartes or the occasionalists but satirizes them. Belacqua's mind is not that of a clear Cartesian reason, but is in contact with insanity.
As Eugene Webb says, 'the allusions to Dante and Descartes that run through Beckett’s novels show both the world out of which twentieth-century man has grown and the manner in which he continues to cling to the comfort of the old illusions.'

Like Proust, Beckett is concerned with 'man as time’s victim.' This view of human nature, mortality, leads to the theme of cyclical time, one of the most important themes of Beckett’s.

In spite of his physical defects, Belacqua feels necessary to move from place to place like later Beckett characters.

My sometime friend Belacqua enlivened the last phase of his solipsism, before he toed the line and began to relish the world, with the belief that the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place. He did not know how this conclusion had been gained, but that it was not thanks to his preferring one place to another he felt sure. He was pleased to think that he could give what he called the Furies the slip by merely setting himself in motion (p. 36). (italics mine)

Even if he moves about outside, he comes back to the starting point like a boomerang with accomplishing nothing. The attribute of movement cannot be dissociated from that of time. In this book time is a symbol of the inexorable reality. In 'Ding Dong,' when Belacqua stops in at a pub, an old woman comes up to him to sell 'seats in heaven, tuppence each.' This seems to Belacqua an exit from cycles of time. She whirls her arm, saying "Heaven goes round."

"Rowan" she said, dropping the d’s and getting more of a spin into the slogan, "rowan an’rowan an’rowan" (p. 45).

As if Belacqua surrendered himself to the cruel fate embodied symbolically by the old woman, he buys the four tickets he does not want. They are 'fer yer friend, yer da, yer ma an’ year motte.' He gets no ticket for himself. In ‘A Wet Night’, the gaudy Bovril sign which represents Annunciation is dancing through its seven phases above the main street in the Christmas season. The sign also symbolizes the cyclical time.

The lemon of faith jaundiced, announcing the series, was in a fungus of hopeless green reduced to singles and abolished. Whereupon the light went out, in homage to the slain. A sly coze of gules, carmine of solicitation, lifting the skirts of green that the prophecy might be fulfilled, shocking Gabriel into cherry, flooded the sign. But the long skirts came rattling down, darkness covered their shame, the cycle was at an end. Da capo. (p. 47).

In Beckett’s work time is linear as well as cyclical. Time decays human body toward death. In ‘Yellow,’ Belacqua undergoes the operation of the tumour on his neck, when the sunbeams on the wall of the room seem to him a ticking clock leading mercilessly to the operation.

But on the grand old yaller wall, crowding in upon his left hand, a pillar of higher tone, representing the sun, was spinning out its placid deisef. This dribble of time, thought Belacqua, like sanies into a bucket, the world wants a new washer (p. 167).

When Belacqua marries Thelma, he gets a clock as a wedding present. It horrifies him.

He who of late years and with the approval of Lucy would not tolerate a chronometer of any kind in the house, for whom—even the sun’s shadow a torment, now to have this time-fuse deafen the rest of his days. It was enough to make him break off the engagement.

Long after she had gone he tossed and turned until the thought, like God appearing to a soul in hell, that he could always spike the monster’s escapement and turn its death’s-head to the wall,
came in the morning with the canticle of the ring-doves. Then he slept (p. 129-130.)

Both a clock and the sun symbolize at once the inexorable linear movement of time toward decay and death, and the inevitable circularity of time’s patterns.

As Beckett says in *Proust*, time is ‘a condition of resurrection because an instrument of death,’ and *Proust* discovers himself as an artist in ‘Time creative and destructive.’ He also says, ‘The Proustian solution consists in the negation of Time and Death,’ Therefore while Beckett characters start in their incessant movements, they tend more and more toward a total immobility, a stasis—Malone, The Unnamable, and above all Winnie in *Happy Days* (1961). Belacqua, prophetic archetype of Beckett heroes, also finds something like timelessness in his constant motion which strangely looks static. It is a gap in reality ‘a Beethoven pause,’ ‘a moving pause’ as he himself defines it. Belacqua, as well as Beckett, ‘had a strong weakness for oxymoron.’ (p. 3) His posture has been suggested in the opening page of ‘Dante and the Lobster’: ‘He was so bogged that he could move neither backward nor forward’ (p. 9). In ‘A Wet Night’: ‘...he was creeping along with his poor trunk parallel to the horizon...’ (he) disposed himself in the knee-and-elbow position on the pavement’ (p. 83). The subject of timelessness is to be succeeded in the next novel as ‘Belacqua bliss’ termed by Murphy.

Belacqua Shuah is a first sketch for the heroes of Beckett’s mature fictions and is not a satisfactory one for Beckett. Belacqua is consistently mocked, scorned, satirized by the narrator. However, they were once ‘Pylades and Orestes for a period’ and ‘the relation abode and was highly confidential while it lasted’ (p. 37). The narrator gives him up in the end, because ‘he is not serious’ (p. 38). Belacqua who is ‘the dirty low-church protestant’ is ‘a whipping-boy,’ ‘persona, alter ego. Beckett criticized his own insufficiency and immaturity by criticizing Belacqua. Beckett was right to have rejected the book to be reprinted until 1970.

Hugh Kenner says that ‘the intended point of the stories is an elaborate pointlessness, a theme for which Beckett at that time did not possess the technique,’ Beckett’s style is a pedant’s artificial one. And yet it is obvious that the rhetorical device itself is a method of presenting his critical spirit and synicism. He relentlessly scoffs with disgust at men, women, the bourgeoisie, and every value. He reminds us of Swift in a sense. For Beckett, like Proust, ‘the quality of language is more important than any system of ethics or aesthetics.’ He has contrived to verbalize human essence—being, self or identity. *More Pricks Than Kicks* predicts us an advent of ‘the artist of great originality and even greater purity who has steadily refused to make any concessions whatsoever to his public.’

Notes

7) Ibid., p. 21.
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17) A. Alvarez: op. cit., p. 25.
21) Beckett was born on April 13th, 1906. A. Alvarez says, 'It was also Good Friday—which seems peculiarly appropriate for a man who subsequently ossessed both with the Crucifixion and the sheer ill luck of existence.' A. Alvarez, op. cit., p. 18.
23) A. Alvarez : op. cit., p. 25.
30) Ibid., p. 59.
31) Ibid., p. 56.
35) A. Alvarez : op. cit., p. 10.

—喜劇的殉教者の像—「蹴り損の権うけ」
阿部洋子
（昭和53年9月30日受理）

サミュエル・ベケットの作品においては従来の小説形式の約束一論理的発展する主題、因果律、具体的背景、全知の語り手など一一が次々に破棄されていき、又、登場人物は人間精神の偉大さを欠いた、ただ片隅に虫のように動く人物である。彼の作品は文学的創造物として成功している一方で、人間の存在論的経験へ非妥協的に集中することによって重要な人間図書となっている。初期の作品である「蹴り損の権うけ」はベケット芸術の刻印をはっきりと文びており、主人公は後の作品の主人公の原型となっている。