

**“Abstracted to death”: “Exagminating” Beckett’s relationship with Ireland through  
“Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce”  
Chris Wrycraft**

More than twenty years before Beckett’s plays cemented an international reputation, his essay “Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce” constituted the beginnings of his literary career. Published in Paris in 1929, the text responds to criticisms of Joyce’s language in the serialization of *Work in Progress*, which would become *Finnegans Wake*. Through Joyce’s work, Beckett also analyses the use of language in literature. He remarks that the English language had been “abstracted to death,” (15), a fault supposedly addressed in Joyce’s writing by uniting content with form. This presentation will consider Beckett’s evaluation of Joyce, in particular the occasionally parodic form utilised within his critique. Parallels between the senses of Beckett and Joyce’s writing will be explored, with Joyce’s influence at this early stage of Beckett’s career more noticeable than in later works. Style and form are crucial to Beckett’s overall meaning, demonstrating how the written message of a text can be reinforced by its composition. An evaluation of whether the text can be considered in any way Irish will also be developed. If Ireland does not feature explicitly in the main body of this text, its form exaggerates a self-aware acknowledgement of its artificiality. This strain of humour might be traced in the works of Beckett’s Irish contemporaries and predecessors, although it is not an exclusively Irish trope. Beckett’s engagement with European texts and philosophy is readily demonstrated, yet his Irish heritage is also subtly signalled through the sometimes satirical tone of the essay. Ireland may not be dealt with in any great detail in the content of Beckett’s critique, however its form as an essay written by one Hibernian expatriate to another invites an unravelling of these potential connections.

**Short Bio:**

Chris Wrycraft received his undergraduate degree in English and Related Literature from the university of York in 2014. In September 2015 he commenced postgraduate study at Trinity College Dublin in the M. Phil course on Irish Writing. Alongside Irish literature and history, he pursues an interest in twentieth century literature, theory and criticism.