This essay proposes that as part of a complex semiotic in which Beckett attempts to overcome his own birth trauma, he displaces the maternal imago onto the Irish public house. In turn, this displacement drives latent creative impulses that mirror the activities of both wombing and weaning in Beckett’s early fiction. The essay also constitutes a humorous but nonetheless relevant intervention in current studies regarding Beckett’s cultural identity by suggesting that Beckett’s early prose, which figures the Irish public house as a maternal space, challenges the male gendering of the pub in post-independence Ireland.

In a letter written to Barney Rosset on 12 November 1955, Beckett opined: “If there is one thing I cannot do is talk about my work, or ‘explain’ it, except perhaps over the third bottle with an indulgent friend” (2011, 567). This quote is interesting for two reasons. Primarily, it signals a relaxed attitude to the business of enjoying a drink or three. This is a welcome development given that Beckett’s relationship with booze had once been more fraught. Secondly, the quote implies an association between the business of writing and drinking, suggesting analysis that employs alcohol might illuminate something otherwise not obvious in the work. This essay aspires to do something similar; to render visible an embedded subtext that revolves around alcohol and its translation into text (and if you wish to enjoy a drink while reading it, please do so).

It is certain that Beckett had embarked upon his drinking career by the time he was ensconced in Paris in 1928, and in the company of Joyce and his coterie. For example, Beckett was notoriously high-spirited on the publication of the French translation of *Ulysses*, arranged to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of Bloomsday in 1929. The day’s festivities, designed to honour Joyce, were marked by the travelling party abandoning Beckett while he visited “one of those temporary palaces which are inseparably associated with the memory of the Emperor Vespasian” (i.e., a urinal) (Joyce, qtd. in Ellmann, 615-16; see also Knowlson, 108-19).

Here form *is* content, content *is* form. [...] His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*. [...] When the sense is dancing, the words dance. [...] The language is drunk. The very words are tilted and effervescent. [...] we cannot hope to snare the sense which is for ever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself.

(Beckett 1983, 27; emphasis in original)

It is interesting to note that in 1929, and when personifying drunken language, Beckett equates drinking with an effervescent creativity. However, by 1934 and his first short story collection *More Pricks Than Kicks* we encounter what appears to be an attempt to negotiate an escape from drinking in order to be more creative; an attempt, essentially, to escape the pub through publication.

In *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, Cronin records Martin Esslin remembering a conversation with Beckett in the 1960s. Esslin asks Beckett if he has a grudge against Ireland:

“Oh no, I’m a fervent patriot and republican.”

“Oh, why do you live in Paris then?”

“Well, you know, if I were in Dublin I would just be sitting around in a pub.”

(265)

Evidently, by the 1960s Beckett saw the pub as a graveyard of creative talent. This view was most likely consolidating in his mind during his analysis in London in the mid-1930s. He had been convinced of the need to undertake psychotherapy as a result of an arrhythmic heart condition that rendered him largely incapacitated, spending large parts of his day in the pub, drinking, in order to forestall panic attacks. However, his condition sufficiently improved during analysis for Beckett to inform Thomas MacGreevy that “if the heart had not put the fear of death into me I would be still boozing and sneering and lounging around and feeling that I was too good for anything else” (qtd. in Knowlson, 210).

Apparently, alcohol had become central to a feckless lifestyle that