THE BECKETT CIRCLE
LE CERCLE DE BECKETT
Newsletter of the Samuel Beckett Society

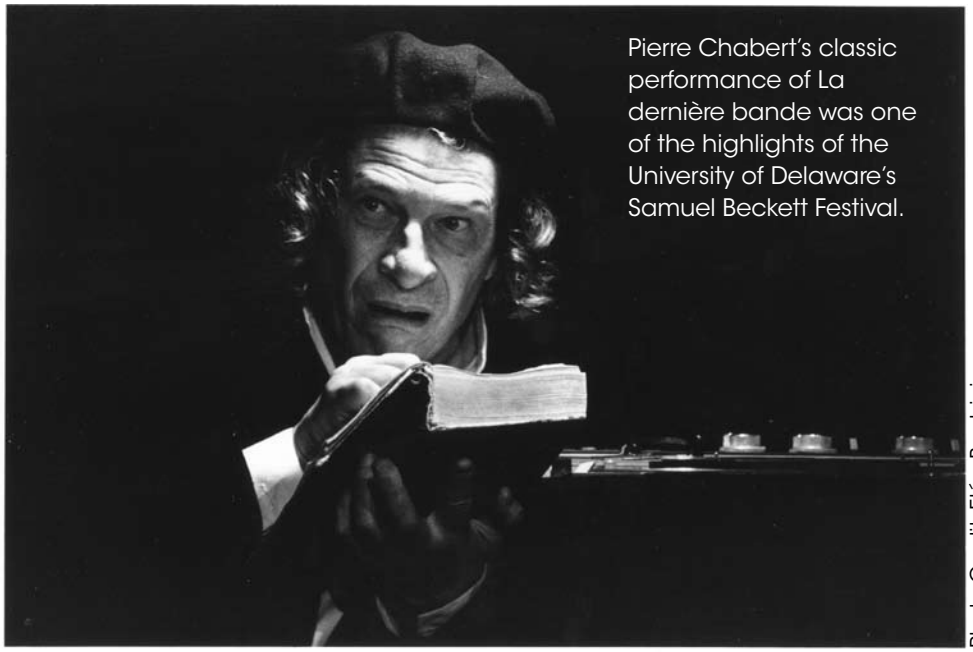
Delaware Celebrates Beckett

The University of Delaware's Samuel Beckett Festival, which took place 9-11 October 2003, was a joint undertaking of the Departments of English, Foreign Languages, and Theatre as well as the University Library that celebrated the addition to the Library's Special Collections of the distinguished private Samuel Beckett collection of the late Sir Joseph Gold. Aiding this effort was a memorable gathering of bearers of the Beckett legacy: Billie Whitelaw, Pierre Chabert, Ruby Cohn, Martha Fehsenfeld, Lois Overbeck, Tom Bishop, Daniel Labeille, Stan Gontarski, Xerxes Mehta, Lois Oppenheim, Jean-Michel Rabaté, and Thomas Cousineau.

Events were held at various campus sites associated with the different sponsoring groups. The English Department's guest-lecture room in Memorial Hall, the "rough theatre" playing space of the Professional Theatre Training Program, a sun-lit Library reading room, a renovated nineteen-thirties balconied auditorium, and a deconsecrated Episcopal church, now restored as a performance and lecture hall (bordered by burial ground and lich gate), were the venues chosen to invoke the spirit of Samuel Beckett.

The Festival's muse was Beckett's own muse, Billie Whitelaw. She graced by her presence all parts of the Festival, and, in her retrospective in Mitchell Hall on Friday evening, she brought the large audience into close touch with Samuel Beckett's humanity, moods, and methods as a director. Accounts of her experiences in performing *Play*, *Not I* (accompanied by a screening of her film version), *Happy Days*, and a reading from *Eh Joe* highlighted her presentation. At the core of Whitelaw's charm is her affectation-free, down-to-earth humanity, which underlies her intuitive and poetic feel for Beckett's plays. And yet there was an hypnotic transcendence, not homespunness, when she read the text of *Eh Joe* — such haunting music of bitter sadness, at once true and ethereal.

Festival proceedings had been inaugurated the previous afternoon by Ruby Cohn, whose opening remarks called attention to Beckett's synthetic sensibilities that marry word and thought to sound (music), sight (art), and movement (dance). Cohn especially emphasized the role that music plays in Beckett's compositional method. In the latter portion of her presentation, she explored Beckett's acute sensitivity to the process of composition, and, in particular, to the mind's moment-by-moment amendment of its thoughts, as reflected in his own impulse to



Pierre Chabert's classic performance of La dernière bande was one of the highlights of the University of Delaware's Samuel Beckett Festival.

Photo Credit: Elán Bachini

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revise as he composes. She suggested that we see him mirroring this restless mental process in, for example, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and then demonstrated, with the aid of a handout of the opening passage of this work, how its narrator compulsively revises or refines the phrasing of the thought that he has just uttered.

The unadorned theatre space of the University's Professional Theatre Training Program (PTTP) provided an appro- priately intimate and austere environment for the capacity audience of two-hundred that attended Pierre Chabert's performance of his signature piece, *La dernière bande.* PTTP production manager Neal Ann Stephens joined her technical skills with Chabert and his associate, Barbara Hutt, to magically transform the space into a hyper-darkened, spare environment that personalized each audience member's identification with the spot-lit figure of Krapp. Non-French speaking members of the audience were assisted prior to the performance by a sheet outlining the dramatic situation, but the language barrier had, in fact, its own compensating reward as the sonorous voice-over of the tape played like a concert which we shared in silence with Krapp, our authoritative listener and guide. Through expression, movement, and gesture, Chabert drew us into Krapp's now-ruined humanity and the volatile, fragile, anguished experience of his birthday ritual. I came to the performance knowing the concluding detail of the swinging overhead lamp that was Chabert's famously fortuitous addition to the text when Beckett directed him in 1975. I thus anticipated the moment unprepared to be surprised, but when it occurred, I was. It imprinted an astonishing and unforgettable stage-image and feeling as the wide and repeated arc of the lamp created a sequence of momentary flashes of a despairing soul sitting lost in silence. The day's proceedings provided just cause for high spirits at the reception following the performance, which was sponsored by the Alliance Française.

"Through expression, movement, and gesture, Chabert drew us into Krapp's now-ruined humanity and the volatile, fragile, anguished experience of his birthday ritual."

At the Friday morning panel session on "Criticism and Scholarship," Stan Gontarski's paper, "Reading Beckett through Beckett's Reading," provided the audience with a preview of his now newly published (in collaboration with C. J. Ackerley) *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Life, Works, and Thought*. Noting, for instance, that John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* (1892) and *Greek Philosophy* (1914) were part of Beckett's reading, Gontarski postulated that "His ontology, a sense of discontinuous being and lack of fixity of any sort, owes as much to the contretemps between Heraclitus and Parmenides as it does to post-Freudian psychoanalysis." Citing Beckett's known appreciation for classic works of art, music, and literature from essentially every period from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, Gontarski suggested that "too few critics have focused on the scope of Beckett's canonical immersion, his borrowings, his allusiveness, and debt to an intellectual tradition he was simultaneously struggling to dismantle," yet for which "he retained a curious nostalgia."

In "Samuel Beckett and the Pursuit of Happiness," Thomas Cousineau argued that attention to Plato's emphasis on the ludic elements of music and dance as the essential ingredients of tragedy – in contrast to Aristotle's focus on plot and character – leads to a greater appreciation of the continuity between *Waiting for Godot* and the ritual drama of ancient Greece. The rhythmical movement that accompanies the back-and-forth dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon and the carefully choreographed movements of the four principal characters in this play, he suggested, could be seen as amounting to a modernist reworking of the ritualized gestures of the Greek chorus, one that is continuous with Plato's delight in geometry and his distrust of theatrical mimesis. While drawing upon ancient ritual, however, Beckett decisively redirects tragic suffering away from the figure of the sacrificial victim and towards the spectators who had come to the theater with the expectation of witnessing his plight from a safe distance. Cousineau concluded his talk by relating Beckett's demystification of the role of the sacrificial victim to the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Christ and to the photographs and postcards of lynchings found in the "Without Sanctuary" exhibition.

Friday afternoon centered on the University of Delaware Library's celebration of its Special Collections Exhibition of the Sir Joseph Gold Samuel Beckett Collection. This began with opening remarks by Sir Joseph Gold's son, Richard Gold, who, along with the rest of the family, had been recruited into the enterprise of finding materials for the collection and to whom Sir Joseph had entrusted the responsibility of placing it in an appropriate research library. His presentation was followed by the Exhibition lecture "Archival Adventures: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett," given jointly by Lois Overbeck and Martha Fehsenfeld. Overbeck noted that serious collectors are systematic in their approach and that scholars who make use of a given collection will benefit from tracing the routes that the collector followed while building it. She stressed also the interdependency of dealers, collectors, archivists, and scholars in the literary enterprise. Joined by Fehsenfeld for a reading from the correspondence, Overbeck shared the example of letters exchanged between Samuel Beckett and Kay Boyle, where a misunderstanding by Boyle led Beckett to a clarification that sheds light on his view of his own aesthetic. A second example – the correspondence relating to Murphy — shed light on the influence that the Belgium-French philosopher Arnold Geulincx had on Beckett. Overbeck concluded with a lure, dressed as a warning, to the students present that they should beware that archival and literary historical scholarship – involving, as it often does, mystery-solving

detective work that leads to serendipitous discoveries — can become an obsession.

Two panels on Saturday morning – one on translation and the other on performance — rounded out the program. In "Me/Not Me: Psychic Boundaries, Language Boundaries, and Beckett," Lois Oppenheim began the first of these panels by connecting Beckett's preoccupation with the experience of absence and nothingness with the bilingual status of his *oeuvre*. Noting what she called Beckett's "anxiety of remembrance," she suggested that "an absence of object constancy (in the psychoanalytic sense of the term) might account for the kind of narrative obsession with memory that we find in Beckett's work. Drawing upon the work of Porter Abbott and others, who have analyzed Beckett's craft of "misremembering," Oppenheim posited a relationship between the experience of sameness and difference as it applies to the process of translation and the "demarcation of boundaries that was the source of his preoccupation with the mind." She used Freud's definition of repression as "a failure of translation" to suggest further connections between personal experience and aesthetic practice. Of particular interest here were her speculations about the fact that Beckett, having distanced himself from his "mother tongue" by the choice of French, began translating his work back into English only after the death of his mother, and even then only with some hesitation.

Photo credit: Daniel Labeille

Conference-coordinator Robert Bennett welcomes Billie Whitelaw and Ruby Cohn to the University of Delaware's Samuel Beckett Festival.

Tom Bishop's presentation "'Heavenly Father, the Creature Was Bilingual': How Beckett Switched to French," provided a lucid and informative overview of the history of Beckett's composing and translating his works into English and French. Beginning with the observation that Beckett's switch to French in the early 1940s allowed him to "purify, to renew himself," Bishop called attention to certain changes in his work that accompanied this choice of French: in particular, the more restrained, ironic expression of emotion and the less frequent resort to puns and word games. He further observed the greater interiority of the works in French and the fact that language itself "becomes progressively dismembered, tortured, victimized, alienated." Bishop then suggested that Beckett's shift to English in the 1950s, both for translations of the French work and for new writing, helped him out of the cul-de-sac to which the switch to French itself had brought him. He concluded by remarking that, although it is difficult to generalize about the considerations that led Beckett to choose between French and English from the 1960s onwards, it is noteworthy that — unlike the French plays, which contain no major female characters – the English plays are replete with them.

The third paper on translation, Jean-Michel Rabaté's "Morphing *Murphy* into French: Beckett's Intranslations," provided an intertextual study that tied Beckett's contemplation of the act of translation and his thoughts on the untranslatable to the notion of Purgatory, via the works of Dante, Apollinaire, Joyce, and Primo Levi. Beginning with the question as to why, in his French translation of *Murphy*, Beckett chose not to translate the pun involving the "stout porter bitter," Rabaté moved to the larger question as to what it means for a writer to be unable to translate himself. Recalling Beckett's famous rejection of Joycean mastery, Rabaté noted the curious literalism of some of Beckett's self-translations into English. Thus the French pun in the title *Comment c'est* disappears in its translation as *How It is*, the curious term "le dépeupleur" becomes "the lost ones," and Beckett despairs of finding an adequate translation of *Worstward Ho* (translated by Edith Fournier after his death as *Cap au pire*). Rabaté also made some interesting observations on the relationship between Apollinaire's *Zone*, a poem that Beckett translated, and the celebrated presentation of the three zones of "Murphy's mind" in chapter six of *Murphy*.

The concluding session on performance included presentations by Xerxes Mehta and Daniel Labeille, and a brief question and answer session with Pierre Chabert. Mehta's compelling account of "Directing Beckett's Short Plays" reflected his artful marriage of technical theatre skills and humanistic sensibility. I will let his paper (which appears in this issue of *The Beckett Circle*) speak for itself, while just adding that for attendees at the talk, his comments on the importance of darkening the auditorium "to break the sense of communal solidarity that a normal theatre audience depends on, [and create a space where] Beckett's spectral apparitions swim out of a [profound] darkness" vividly called to mind their experience of *La dernière bande*, which they had seen two nights before.

Daniel Labeille, in a fluent and relaxed off-podium, off-text talk, shared details of his work and correspondence with Beckett in the preparation for the premiere of *Rockaby* at the Buffalo Beckett Festival that he had organized in honor of Beckett's seventy-fifth birthday. After the performance by Pierre Chabert and Billie Whitelaw's

reminiscences, there was for me, at this closing event of the Festival in the nave of a decommissioned church, a feeling of an imminent presence when Labeille read Beckett's letters to him, both professional and personal in tone, regarding details of the production. Since it was Labeille's initiative that has preserved on film Alan Schneider's work with Billie Whitelaw on *Rockaby*, it was fitting that he addressed the vexed subject of the liberties that the "Beckett on Film" series has taken in adapting Beckett's plays to the medium of film. He noted the authority these films gain simply by reason of their wide distribution and expressed concern that people who are experiencing Beckett for the first time in this way would be "greatly misled" in cases where the filmed versions are not true to Beckett's vision.

The session, and the Festival, concluded with Pierre Chabert responding to questions from the audience. Lois Potter, the university's distinguished authority on drama, was drafted on the spot and served admirably as translator. The remarkable assemblage of Beckett friends, performers, directors, and scholars bestowed a world of wisdom in a brief time, such that retired physician and now advanced Ph.D. candidate William Taylor declared afterward, "I learned so much! I have added Beckett to my orals reading list." They also brought a warmth, generosity, enthusiasm, and sense of community that gave the Festival a feeling of wholeness, knitting the various parts into a truly celebrative occasion.

— Robert Bennett

Hugh Kenner: A Personal Remembrance

There is one image of Hugh that always comes back to me when I think of him. He is sitting in his office at his desk, lost in thought, eating an apple. The image was caught in a moment as I passed his open door, and it has stayed with me ever since. I am not entirely sure why it should, but I think there is something about the simplicity of the apple that not only sets off the extraordinary range and complexity of his thought but is also sufficient to it. I cannot claim to have known Hugh well enough to know what, if anything, would have been sufficient to him, but it seemed to me that all he really needed was to think. Marooned on a desert island, with enough apples, he could conjure a universe.

Like many now reading these words, I was first introduced to Hugh Kenner by his 1961 book, *Samuel Beckett*, and still have that Evergreen Original (price: $1.95). At the time, I was thinking idly about a possible dissertation to be called "The Novel of the Absurd" in which I was going to apply the terms of another 1961 book, Martin Esslin's *Theater of the Absurd*, to modern fiction, but I was having serious difficulties with an author named Samuel Beckett. So I picked up Kenner, who claimed in his first sentence that his book was "meant not to explain Samuel Beckett's

Photo Credit: Rick O'Quinn

work but to help the reader think about it." I thought this was a promising attitude. It was in Hugh Kenner's book that I read sentences like this one on Watt's socks:

> That there should be three other distributions of two socks, and that this, which has been chosen, can be resolved into its elements and reasons assigned thereto; that logic indeed is on the side of this one only: to linger in the presence of these truths yields to the pedantic mind enduring satisfaction, into which is appreciably subsumed the raw discomfort of wearing a boot, size twelve, and a shoe, size ten, on feet sized each eleven. So inventory yields ceremony, and ceremony anesthesia." (102)

And these on the bicycle: "Here Euclid achieves mobility: circle, triangle, rhombus, the clear and distinct patterns of Cartesian knowledge. Here gyroscopic stability vies for attention with the ancient paradox of the still point and the rim" (123). So that I could think with wonder: People can actually write like this and succeed in this business?

The first person who ever spoke to me about Hugh Kenner was Marshall McLuhan. I took his seminar the last year I was at Toronto. It was the year the press found him, so that most meetings of the seminar were jammed with reporters and cameras and bright lights. The final exam, perhaps as a respite, was a walk with Marshall McLuhan in Queens Park, he in his thick tweed suit, smoking a cigar. It was very pleasant. Somewhere in the conversation I mentioned that I had accepted a job at UC Santa Barbara. He told me UCSB had once offered him a job but that he

had turned it down because California had had no nineteenth century. It was harmful, he told me, for children to be raised where there had been no nineteenth century. He also told me to watch out for Hugh Kenner. Kenner was paranoid. I should be careful.

Hard as I looked for any telltale signs of paranoia in Hugh Kenner, I never found a trace. He was an odd duck, for sure, but odd in the way child prodigies are odd. When I met him, he was still very much a child prodigy, and as far as I can see he never stopped being a child prodigy, and for that we can all be thankful. It meant that the world never stopped being a source of wonderment, so that everywhere he turned his mind he found something new where others were assiduously cultivating the familiar. It also kept him, both by nature and necessity, from any inclination to adopt the protective coloration of terminology belonging to the latest hot thing. He seemed so well seated in himself, so well pleased just to be Hugh Kenner. As a result, the books he produced year after year were floats in a parade going every which way (from modernism to mechanics to mathematics to microchips), with few if any folks marching in the rear. He was nonetheless recognized and received many honors. He gave multitudes of invited lectures all over the world (those amazing performances, delivered entirely without notes, by a speaker as unfazed on the podium as he might have been talking to you at dinner), and he died occupying not one but two named professorships at the University of Georgia. Still, in all the search committees I have served on, and all the bibliographies in all the applications, I never come across anything like a "Kennerian Approach" to anything.

The period of my assistant professorship at UCSB exactly coincided with Hugh's and my colleagueship. It was also the period of Kent State and Watergate, of the bombings in Cambodia and Hanoi, of the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Locally, the Faculty Club was bombed, the Black Students Union took over the Computer Center, the Bank of America burned down, and police and students rioted for a week in Isla Vista. The department at that time was in no better shape than the country. It was a large dysfunctional family where assistant professors out-numbered tenured faculty by a ratio of 2 to 1 and faced nothing so certain as termination. So fast and dependable was the turnover in personnel that the department softball team named itself "The Flobotts" for "Floating Bottom."

Hugh was politically conservative. He wrote articles for *The National Review.* William F. Buckley, Jr., was a close friend and, legend would have it, best man at his second wedding (Hugh's first wife had died). As for yours truly, the young ephebe, he was, like many of his generation, "rad-lib," at times hotly so, and he wore his politics – national and departmental – on his sleeve. Hugh was fully aware of my politics and my departmental agitation and what must have seemed my general bad behavior. And yet I never had the sense that any of this inflected his attitude toward me and my work. When we talked it was like entering a world above all contestation where we were both on the same side, and any topic at all was just full of surprises. We were colleagues in a common pursuit, and that came first.

Hugh was a modernist and his Beckett was too: a High one, if the adjective can somehow be uncontaminated. His Beckett was, before all things, an artist, il miglior fabbro, whose work was made difficult in direct proportion to the breadth of intelligence with which he grasped our collective ignorance and the honesty that kept him from denying it. Lois Overbeck kindly put me in touch with Kenner's 1977 response to the *New York Times Book Review*, when he was asked who he admired most among writers: "Who else but Sam Beckett?" What he featured in Beckett, both as a person and an artist, says much about Hugh's own values:

> This gentle, generous, punctilious man appears on no talk shows, offers no opinions, grants no interviews, and writes sentences. I could show you a Beckett sentence as elegant in its implications as the binomial theorem, and another as economically sphinx-like as the square root of minus one, and another, on trees in the night, for which half of Wordsworth would seem a fair exchange. The decorative sentence, he makes you suppose, is perhaps man's highest achievement, as absolute as the egg was for Brancusi. That hens lay eggs round the clock the way grocers utter sentences renders neither Brancusi's nor Beckett's preoccupation trivial. We have an obligation to speak with the tongues of angels, as if we could, and a man who won't tire of confronting this obligation can remind us all of our calling.
>
> — *Porter Abbott*

THE SAMUEL BECKETT ENDPAGE

A multiple resource website for anyone and everyone interested in Beckett and his work, the Endpage is always in progress and infinitely expandable. Contributions, postings, criticism, or suggestions are encouraged and can be made onsite at:

http://beckett.english.ucsb.edu

Or by contacting Porter Abbott (pabbott@english.ucsb.edu). The Endpage contains the official homepage of the Samuel Beckett Society.

ESSAY

Directing Beckett's Short Plays

A few years ago, I was in the lobby of a theatre at which a production of *Not I* was in progress, when, quite close to the end of the play's twelve-minute duration, a door from the theatre was pushed open and a young woman came crawling out on her hands and knees. When asked whether she was all right, she said: "I had to get out of there." Since the performance space was necessarily pitch dark, she had found her freedom in the only way available to her. I recall this rather grim episode, not because spectators make a habit of fleeing Beckett, or even just my productions of Beckett, but because it perhaps touches on a certain kind of power that his late works secrete.

This power is akin to that of dreams, even nightmares, of ghostings and hauntings, of sweat-soaked awakenings in the dawn that "shed no light."[1] Visual images of iconic strangeness and authority emerge from the dark, burn into our retinas and brains, and recede into the dark; sonic images—whispers, rustles, screams, the buzz of racing words—break silence and disappear into silence. All this in works that hang around unpredictably—sometimes for half an hour or so, sometimes for a few minutes, once, memorably, for thirty seconds. Everything about such a theatre startles, shocks, disturbs, assaults, horrifies, seduces and displaces, as it swats the receiving consciousness through confining membranes of the normal and the conceptually assimilable, even as it strips that consciousness of all its hard-earned protections, chief among these being analytic and discursive modes of thought.

Faced with bringing such a theatre to life, designers and directors somewhat unexpectedly find that certain compulsions that they usually despise about themselves, in fact deplore as their least useful or attractive traits, are the very habits that Beckett seems to value most. I refer to a kind of dogged literalness and, equally, to an obsessiveness about minute detail that, in any other context, would be unbearable. Take, for example, the matter of darkness. Beckett's spectral apparitions swim out of a darkness so profound that a spectator should not be able to see even the outline of his hand held up before his face. Light deprivation at this level breaks the sense of communal solidarity that a normal theatre audience depends on to define itself and defend itself against the stage. The spectator's receiving consciousness is thereby isolated and cast adrift, her only company the beating of her own heart, her only anchor the ghost before her. Thus is a kind of dependence created and an intimacy enforced that, in my view, has no parallel in modern theatre, and that is the indispensable ground for the demolition and rebuilding of the spirit that follows.

Abolishing light, however, is less simple than it sounds. When I have taken productions on tour, it is normal for a skilled professional crew to use the entire first day simply to lightproof the performing space. This usually involves turning off Exit lights that are even peripherally visible to the audience; gelling down Exit lights behind the audience; doing the same with aisle lights, when they cannot be turned off outright; vacuuming carpeted areas and frequently wet-mopping the stage, the wings and all uncarpeted spaces, so that as close to a dust-proof environment as possible is achieved, since dust motes make light beams visible; building black-box surrounds for lighting instruments; taping over vent-holes in those instruments to the degree that will allow them to get through twenty minutes without exploding; covering reflective surfaces, such as certain high-gloss stage floors, with heavy black wool, the most light absorbent material we have found; taping up doors and windows; hanging black drapes over all upstage and wing spaces, as well as audience entrance and exit areas, and so on. Certain of these steps are, of course, illegal, and I confess to the dubious distinction of having struggled with fire marshals in three countries, as I suspect other Beckett directors have as well. I mention all this only to introduce you to a small sample of the obsessive-compulsive behavior called forth by these simple little Beckett bagatelles.

When all goes well, such efforts gradually yield the images that the plays demand. These apparitions are sometimes built from inanimate materials—life-sized funeral urns, a skull-sized globe of light, a rocking chair that rocks without human agency—but more usually are constructed on and from bits of the human body—a mouth suspended in blackness, two identical white-haired specters bent over a table, three fossilized heads protruding from the aforesaid urns, a wraith-like figure compulsively pacing a narrow strip of ground. Movement is minimal, stillness the norm. Sounds, when they emerge, are as emblematic as the sights—speech slower than normal or faster than normal, assaultive or recessive, monotones, whispers, verbal dronings—abstractions all, sonic image and visual image coalescing into inner landscapes of loneliness, terror, dislocation, fury, resistance, and loss.

The body bits I just mentioned of course belong to living, breathing actors, although the breathing part is occasionally optional at certain moments in performance. As is well known by now, the physical and psychic stresses on the Beckett actor are extreme, and mediating between actor and text becomes the director's most challenging responsibility. The physical issues range from burning eyes, caused by the unblinking stare that several works call for, sometimes for over a minute at a time; to back and joint problems that the swiveling repetitions of *Footfalls* can produce; to the panic, disorientation and loss of balance that the sensory deprivation and inhuman tempo of

Play and *Not I* invariably generate.

Serious as such stresses are, they are dwarfed by their psychic counterparts. The most problematic of these is Beckett's demand that the actor not act but rather simply learn and recite text at the requisite speed in the requisite monotone, while remaining perfectly still, with, for good measure, his or her face partially or wholly obscured. Such a demand denatures the professional Western actor. One might argue that "colorless" is a relative term, or that Beckett himself, when he read his text to Billie Whitelaw, was, in her words, "an absolute powerhouse of emotion,"[2] or that a residual subjectivity will always obtain when one human being appears in front of another. But, for all that, the demand remains, its essence legitimate, for we are dealing here with an emblematic theatre. The actor must relinquish his subjectivity to the shape and mandate of the emblem, which is the source of this theatre's identity and power.

If that were the end of the matter, however, rehearsals might be unrewarding and grueling, but not inherently complicated. The performers would summon their technical training, grit their teeth and execute. Fortunately, this is not the case; on the contrary, for me at least, Beckett rehearsals are entirely thrilling affairs. For the plays, having first transformed performers into apparitions —character is somehow not the word here—that look a certain way and sound a certain way, promptly, and rather insidiously, make an implied counter-demand. The source of this counter-current is the works' verbal content. However compressed and abstracted the sonic image—drone, buzz, whisper, incantation, tirade—and however revelatory the sonic image *as* sonic image—the ceaseless flow of consciousness, the unstoppable, indecipherable logorrhea of memory, personal history, alienation, rage, desire, loss—the words eventually individuate and find their way into the nerve endings of the receiving consciousness.

A defining glory of the late plays, these words are of the simplest, most limpid eloquence. Often no more than a syllable or two in length, offered in clusters that perfectly fit a single exhaled breath, they are suffused with tenderness for the human condition, a tenderness that somehow endures even when, perhaps especially when, a work's ostensible matter is most bitter or comic or violent. The actors, of course, respond to this tenderness, this gentleness, this clear-eyed and unsparing love for their own species, yet are forbidden to express their response. What happens then is that, for want of a better term, an emotional field arises around the preparation of each work, a clarifying substratum of sympathy that touches off deep personal echoes in the performers, that is the stronger for never being discussed, but that underlies every aspect of the surface abstraction, while never intruding upon it. What it does do, however, is release into what could easily remain a mechanical exercise a personal investment, a physical and psychic energy, a vibrancy of body and voice that simultaneously strengthen the controlling emblem and invite the spectator to penetrate it.

Put another way, one might say that the visual icon is singular. It floats out of its cocoon of blackness, it sucks the spectator into itself, but it does not change. Its absoluteness is fixed. The sonic icon, on the other hand, is insidiously contrary. Janus-like, its opening face is as unyielding as the sight from which it seems to emanate. Together, this pair of joint absolutes smashes through "the pales and forts of reason," supplying no means of understanding, offering nowhere else to look, nothing else to hear, bludgeoning the receiving consciousness into a state of helpless acquiescence. It is at this point that the sonic emblem starts to reveal its other, even more lethal, face. The ear acclimatizes, words start to register, and life floods back in, in all its hopeless complexity, horror, stupidity and tenderness.

The true power of these plays, it seems to me, lies in this second stage, not in the first. The shock of the initial assault is, I suggest, merely a means to an end. At the moment when the spectator might start to recover her equilibrium and sense of self, the narrative takes hold and she is lost. Because no character exists on stage, she cannot displace her grief onto a suffering subject. Because no suffering performer exists on stage, she cannot unburden her grief onto the emblem's neutral mask. It is as if a direct transference were taking place between Beckett's haunted spirit and hers. The art object has become a transparency, through which the original creator recreates the world into which he has been hurled.

It would be presumptuous of me to leave you with the impression that what I have said so far is a description of my own practice. Rather it is a kind of unacknowledged ideal that my treasured co-creating colleagues[3] and I muddle toward in our efforts to realize these grand and mysterious works. We fail with every attempt. Sometimes the failure is a little less decisive than usual—and then we celebrate.

— *Xerxes Mehta*

Notes

1. Samuel Beckett, *Ohio Impromptu* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 18.
2. Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 235.
3. Performers Wendy Salkind, Sam McCready, Peggy Yates and Bill Largess; lighting designer Terry Cobb.

This talk was first delivered at the Samuel Beckett Festival at the University of Delaware on October 11, 2003.

Krapp's Last Tape in Chicago

The Chicago Humanities Festival presented sold-out performances, 1-2 November 2003, of *Krapp's Last Tape* under the direction of Antoni Libera, the much-honored translator, novelist, and director whom Samuel Beckett called "my deputy in Eastern Europe." The production, featuring Chicago actor, director, and classics scholar D. Nicholas Rudall, promised a glimpse into the world of "pure Beckett." The performances, as well as an interview with Libera, revealed that his fidelity to Beckett expresses itself in a nuanced, fluid, and very human interpretation of the play.

The play was presented at the intimate Victory Gardens Theatre as part of the Krehbiel Series on Irish Culture. The festival format allowed very limited rehearsal time on stage, a challenge for a play in which movement and technical cues are so precisely choreographed. Fortunately, Ruddall commanded the stage like a rumpled Prospero. His co-star, the reel- to-reel tape recorder, performed with equal authority thanks to sound designer Steve Zimmers and Stage Manager Karl Sullivan.

Krapp is described as "White face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair. Unshaven." This description, in addition to the long opening routine with the banana, might suggest a clown-like figure, but Ruddall seemed more like an ordinary person whose guard was down—he could have been a member of the Humanities Festival audience. Awkward, frustrated, cranky, he tried to control the past through his annual ritual with his collection of tapes. Winding, rewinding, and forwarding, he suggested Prospero setting out his book and staff to perform rough magic. In preparing the tapes, Krapp appeared a man uncomfortable with his corporeal self. The actor held his body stiffly—the effect was of old age, certainly, but also of the intense effort that Krapp must martial to deny his deepest feelings. Ruddall has had great success in plays like *Butley* and *The Dresser* that explore ageing men who suspect that they've wasted their lives. On the most literal level, one could see this performance as connected to the long line of tales of embittered and alcoholic professors, especially since both Libera and Ruddall have strong ties to academia. However, the play transforms these mundane possibilities with profound language and even more powerful silences.

The highlight of the performance was the triple narration of "the memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty." Libera's direction was unmannered and musical: Ruddall brilliantly caught the rocking rhythm, both sexual and marine, that permeates the language. The audience — absorbed in the words and perhaps in their own memories – held its breath. At the end of the play, Ruddall's face became receptive and his shoulders relaxed, no longer straining against the force of time past. He no longer continued the Olympian struggle to control the story of his life. There are many ways to read Krapp's final silence as he stares out into space. With this production, it seemed possible that, since Krapp has finally learned to listen, there is nothing left to do. The actor's breathing created a level of communication that seemed Zen-like.

Reflecting on Beckett's inspiration for *Krapp's Last Tape* during my interview with him, Libera explained, "I have some ideas how he could think about Krapp. Beckett knew Schopenhauer's biography. He was successful, yet alone: a pedantic man who had some love affairs, but he was dominated by the will." Libera further connects Krapp with Hyppolytus in Racine's *Phèdre* and, more generally, with the Senecan rejection of love and passion in favor of the intellect. At the same time, however, Libera also sees Beckett's plays as emerging from a preconscious place where the roots of language themselves take shape. Indeed, as in many of Beckett's short plays, images of breathing and rocking go beneath language itself to a sensual, preliterate world. The descriptions of light on flesh and shadows on water could as easily come from the world of painting.

Libera was introduced to Beckett as an eight year old when his parents took him to the first production of *Waiting for Godot* in Warsaw because they couldn't find a babysitter As a young student he read *Endgame*, which he experienced as "a kind of turning point." His work as a translator was initially accompanied by an academic career; then his Beckett production at a student drama festival brought acclaim that led to professional theatrical opportunities. He describes his directing as "a consequence of translation. . . . The purpose was to hear the quality of my translation from the page."

He takes the simple but firm approach that Beckett knew exactly what he wanted and that his plays work "from the outside in": if a director and actors can do the language and follow the stage directions precisely, the experience of the play will touch the audience as Beckett intended. Libera rejects the idea that a director can alter Beckett's texts as a conductor might vary the tempi or the dynamics of a musical score. He believes that an experimental approach is possible with some authors, but not with Beckett, and agrees with the Beckett estate's withholding of permissions for non-traditional productions that change settings or the gender of the characters.

Libera rejects the idea that a director can alter Beckett's texts as a conductor might vary the tempi or the dynamics of a musical score.

In support of his contention that Beckett's work is "deeply rooted in reality," Libera points out that Beckett's bleak landscapes are not symbols, but reflections of what he actually saw in events like the aftermath of the bombardment of Dieppe. He recalls Beckett's telling him that this experience of the destroyed city was one source of his writing and notes that the ruins in Beckett's plays struck post-war audiences in his beloved Warsaw as very natural and real. Libera said that for his parents' generation,

"to be in prison, to be closed, to be a beggar, a poor man was very understandable because of real experiences." Remembering his meeting with Beckett in 1978, Libera commented, "My feeling was and is that he felt something special about the essence of being. He's not only an artist, but a prophet, an extraordinary human being." The audience at Victory Gardens could feel this too. It would be wonderful to have Libera in Chicago for a longer period of time.

— Eileen Seifert

A week before the actual performance of *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Chicago Humanities Festival, Wright College invited Antoni Libera to present his insights into the play and actor D. Nicholas Rudall to read excerpts from Krapp's monologue. The evening was well attended — with over one hundred and seventy-five students and visitors seated in a comfortable theater space at the college. Libera explored the background of Krapp's Last Tape and showed three short outtakes from various productions: the BBC version with Patrick Magee (1972); the 1969 German production with Martin Held; and Libera's own British production with David Warrilow (set design by Jocelyn Herbert —Haymarket Theatre / Riverside Studios 1989-1990).

After dividing Krapp's thirty-year-old monologue into four parts, Libera isolated one moment as the most significant in the play because it is here that Krapp identifies himself as Krapp per se. As Libera explained, " [Krapp] installs *'the new light above his table,'* and seems to discern symbolic significance in this trivial change: *'I love to get up and move about in it [i.e., "the darkness"], then back here to . . . me. Krapp.'"* Libera commented:

> This, in my view, is one of the key sentences in the play. It is here that, for the first and only time, Krapp pronounces his name. And it is here that he defines himself: the person he identifies as himself, the person he calls Krapp, is that person, and that person alone, who struggles at the table, in the light, to express his own truth – the man who "purges" himself of life *in this particular way.* And his name, homonymous with the most succinct description of the activity (or product) to which he likens this process (or result) of purging, neatly defines the essence of that identity.

Libera continued by interrogating the significance of this self-identification, and probing just what "emerges from Krapp's confrontation with himself." He notedthat Krapp ultimately condemns "himself for mistaking his own identity. Not for being a certain person, but for *thinking*, mistakenly, that he, Krapp, was a certain person," Libera remarked upon the multiple puzzles inherent in such a belief about oneself.

For this prolific director and translator of Beckett's works, what seems important is to understand the various and contradictory versions of Krapp that exist in the play, and to realize that there really isn't any way to decide which is the "real" Krapp:

> *Is* there a "real" Krapp? The answer seems to be: no. There are many Krapps, and each of them will always be wrong about himself; there will always be a later Krapp who will reject the earlier Krapps. So the man who identifies himself as Krapp *cannot* be right. We are never right when we say "*This* is me!", for there *is* no *one* real "me." Each Krapp is right about himself from his point of view, and none of them are right from the point of view of the others.

Aligning Beckett with Eastern thought, Libera concluded: "Buddha said people are wrong to think there is such a thing as the self, but also wrong to think that there isn't. And in this thought Beckett found a subject of tragedy." Closing with the three aforementioned film versions of *Krapp* (in English, German and Polish), Libera complicated the idea of the "real" Krapp even further.

—Eileen O'Halloran

Serge Merlin's Le Dépeupleur

The affinity that the actor Serge Merlin has long felt with *Le Dépeupleur* was very much in evidence during the stage performance that he gave of this enigmatic text on an October evening at the Théâtre de l'Odéon's intimate "Ateliers Berthier" theatre. Entering the stage by a small door hidden in the wall at the rear, with a thick packet of loose pages under his arm, Merlin walked across the stage and seated himself at a long, black table. He then meticulously, almost obsessively, arranged the pages in front of him, as though he were a lecturer or perhaps someone who was about to read to himself. His initial actions did not prepare the audience for the quality of his voice, which declaimed the opening words of *Le Dépeupleur* in a deep and well-modulated manner. Spreading out like a shock-wave from the circle of light surrounding the actor, the words of Beckett's text echoed throughout the theatre, which was now plunged in total darkness, thus creating a strangely resonating effect.

The staging of this performance as a *reading* to be presented by an actor who had just arrived on stage with his script was quickly transformed by a powerful vocal and gestural performance that not only described but seemed actually to construct, visually and tangibly, the little world of the cylinder. Merlin appeared to observe the wandering bodies as they climbed up the ladders to the niches and tunnels, allowing his searching and scrutinizing gaze to encompass to its furthest reaches the space in which they are enclosed. In this mysterious place, which is separated from an improbable outer world that is accessible, according to time-honoured belief, only by a path that cannot be found, "none looks within himself where none can be." While Merlin underlined the distancing ironies that often emerge in the text, he also shared the suffer-

ings of his "little people." As soon as the first words had been spoken, his eyes rose from the page, to which they then returned only briefly. He turned the pages at irregular moments and spoke long passages by heart. Rather than examining this closed system from without, he seemed to be inside of it, within the core of the imaginative and invisible boundaries of the text, locked up in this "abode" whose story he, as though he were a visionary, narrated before witnessing its extinction.

Spectators to Merlin's performance were led inevitably to wonder whose story this was; who, precisely, was telling it; how, if at all, the narrator was linked to these roaming bodies; and what this enclosed, no-exit abode had to tell us about our own lives. Equally tantalizing and perplexing questions were raised about the origins of the laws and codes that prevail within the cylinder, governing the movements of each inhabitant towards the lost other (nowhere to be found) towards absence and nothingness. Herein lies the fundamental mystery of *Le Dépeupleur.* Merlin's stage performance never reduced the complexity of the relationship between the narrator and the bodies that inhabit this hermetically closed world. He was not the indifferent "thinking being coldly intent on all these data and evidences" that the reader of Beckett's text might imagine in the silence of his or her room. Rather, like a Greek chorus, he empathised with the creatures whom he observed on this mental stage and whose lives he understood no better than they did. Merlin repeated the word "fraternity" twice, breathlessly and with a rasping voice that suggested the implausible idea that words alone could briefly revive this otherwise empty concept, whose ultimate absence condemns men to infinite solitude. His very presence conveyed Merlin's involvement in the sufferings and doubts of this little group of searchers, climbers, sedentaries, and vanquished beings, as though he himself had given up long before the game had even started.

After conjuring up one final image, "last of all if a man," who advances slowly before coming to a halt, Merlin returned to the text. When his eyes met the page again, he seemed to discover, as though for the first time, the final state of the cylinder. He brought this world to an end, in the same way that he had begun it, by reading from his pages. Turning the last page and then standing up provided the only imaginable conclusion for a world that had been returned to the ineffable silence of an impossible grave. Merlin both performed and accompanied this poignant odyssey to its bitter, "unthinkable end."

— Diane Luscher-Morata

Peter Hall's Happy Days

After Natasha Parry's Winnie, directed by Peter Brook at the Bouffes du Nord five years ago, comes Felicity Kendall's, directed by Peter Hall. For an English audience, Kendall's face cannot fail to recall the character she performed in *The Good Life*, a long-running TV series in which she played a naïve ecologist living in suburbia who could always extract herself from contradictory situations by a pretty pout or kittenish smile. Her *Good Life* partner was Richard Briers who went on, in 1997, to reveal remarkable depths in his performance of the old man in Ionesco's *The Chairs*, directed by Simon McBurney. Felicity Kendall's Winnie also successfully effaces her cookie *Good Life* persona. She looks genuinely old and broken down, so that her persistent optimism has just the right pathetic, touching quality. She has also worked hard at developing her vocal range, finding a low, hoarse tone that she employs most effectively for the passages of coarse or cynical comment.

And yet, it is as though she does not quite trust the text to fill the eighty minutes of playing time. Her vocal variations seem intended to give relief to the text more than to serve the Beckettian rhythms and she ignores almost every one of the pauses in Beckett's text. Most damagingly, she attempts an Irish brogue, which wobbles in and out of focus like Winnie herself, "clear, then dim, then gone […] in and out of someone's eye." On the one hand, the relentless speed and uncertain inflexions of her delivery well

convey a woman on the edge of a nervous breakdown. On the other, these quirks prevent her from touching the deeper layer of despair that can rise to the surface if the pauses as well as the rhythms are respected.

The set, by Lucy Hall, is a rather modish attempt at doing something new, setting Winnie at the centre of a descending spiral or vortex of turf, instead of atop the low mound of Beckett's stage direction. This creates difficulties for Willie, who must clamber around in the empty area behind the spiral and who can only be construed as inhabiting a kind of dream space. When Peter Brook directs his wife or Peter Hall is designed by his daughter, this play becomes a family affair. Maybe that is just the opposite of what is wanted? Maybe it makes the whole enterprise too cosy? When Madeleine Renaud gave the first French performance, she was not directed by her husband, Jean-Louis Barrault, but by Roger Blin. Beckett worried that she would be "on the light side for this hardened sorrower" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 600). But her performance was never cosy. There was a rigorous musical quality to it, and a bleak, clear-eyed despair, despite the self-deceiving cheerfulness. Felicity Kendall calls to mind a pianist required to perform a difficult Chopin Mazurka, but dogged by a determination to play it as though it had no more range than the waltz by Lehar from *The Merry Widow* that brings Winnie's happy day to an end.

— David Bradby

The descending spiral in which Winnie (Felicity Kendall) is buried was designed by Lucy Hall.

Joe Chaikin: 1935 - 2003

Although I admired Joe Chaikin in the theater, we became friends only in 1976, partly because of his love of Beckett's work, which he read aloud to himself. In 1980 Joe sent Beckett a tape of his reading from the latter's work. Beckett didn't like the tape, but, paradoxically, he began an epistolary friendship with Joe, as can be gleaned from some three dozen of his letters now at Kent State University. Beckett and Chaikin met only twice, and the actor/director partook of only a few Beckett works, without ever following Beckett's suggestions. (In 1969 Joe played Hamm for the Open Theater, and in 1977 he directed *Endgame*. In 1981, with carte blanche from Beckett, Joe and Steve Kent evolved their own text to perform *Texts for Nothing* and *How It Is*. After Beckett's death, Joe directed *Godot, Texts, Endgame, That Time, Nacht und Traume*, and *Happy Days*, and he performed the role of Voice in a radio version of *Cascando*.) Several of Joe's letters to me say that he was "obsessed with Beckett."

In May, 1984, Joe underwent his third open-heart surgery, after which he suffered a stroke. Aphasic thereafter, he nevertheless dictated a letter to Beckett, which the latter answered "heart to heart." When Beckett himself suffered a stroke in 1988, he began the poem "Comment dire" while still in the hospital. I carried Beckett's manuscript to Reading, and, reading it, I thought of Joe, who had negotiated a comparable return to language. Since Joe knew no French, I asked Beckett whether he would translate it for Joe, and he did so. "What is the Word" was Beckett's last creation, and Joe drew strength from it — beyond words.

— Ruby Cohn

Carey Perloff on Waiting for Godot

As Beckett famously said about his mentor James Joyce, "His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself.*" This statement became our guiding principle in rehearsing a recent production of *Waiting for Godot* at the American Conservatory Theater. For American actors trained in psychological real-

The set for the American Conservatory Theater's production of Waiting for Godot was designed by J. B. Wilson.

ism, there is something liberating about performing a play by Beckett: one need not pretend to be a woman trapped in dirt or a man suffocating in a garbage pail; one *is* the thing itself. Even in *Godot*, where the entrapment is less literally constricting than in later plays such as *Happy Days* or *Play*, the physical condition of the actors enduring the play overrides any psychological interpretation of character and becomes the crux of the entire exploration. For example, Beckett calls for the actor playing Gogo (Gregory Wallace at A.C.T.) to wear ill-fitting boots with no socks and to sit on an uneven and decidedly hard stone for long periods of time. Inevitably, as he rehearses, his back starts to ache and his feet are rubbed raw by the boots. Eight hours later, the rehearsal is still going on. By the time he gets up to go home, every bone in his body aches. No matter how "comfortable" one tries to make things for the actor (how many ways can you pad a rock??) the physical pain of creating the character is inescapable. He doesn't have to imagine Gogo's pain or interpret its cause; he simply has to live within it.

The same is true for the actor playing Lucky (in our case, the incomparable Frank Wood). Hour after hour the actor bends over with a heavy bag in one hand and a picnic basket in the other. Even if the actor is half the age of the putatively seventy-year-old Lucky, the "carrying" takes its toll. As the rehearsals progresses, the actor starts to slump, his head drops, he eventually comes close to sleeping on his feet, the very thing Beckett describes in reference to Lucky. And then, after all that, he has to stand center-stage in front of the rest of the company and recite a fifteen-minute "tirade." Certainly, Lucky's speech can be interpreted in many ways, but the act of giving birth to it is the most palpable expression of its theme. If Lucky's God is "aphasic" and Lucky's own sense of language is deteriorating rapidly, leading to his muteness in Act 2, then surely one of the things Lucky's speech is "about" is the profound struggle of articulation. The mental and physical effort required of the actor to learn and deliver that speech is enormous. Indeed, in witnessing the speech one is never entirely sure whether one is witnessing the struggle of the actor to call forth the speech, or the struggle of Lucky to call forth his thoughts. And in a sense it doesn't matter. His speech is not about something, it is that something itself. One becomes mesmerized by the corporeality of speaking, by the desperate gyrations of the mouth of the actor/Lucky as he gropes and strains for the language of his speech. It becomes viscerally clear that "thinking" is indeed a physical act, and that to command someone to "think" is more demanding and difficult than commanding them to run a mile or stand on one leg. No wonder one needs a magic hat.

Before commencing rehearsals of *Godot*, I set up certain rules that I felt compelled to observe. First, because of its focus on the tribulations of the body, I felt that *Godot* was a play that needs to be rehearsed with all of its physical conditions intact from the beginning. We started the first day of rehearsal with a rack of clothes (awful old coats, bowler hats, oversized trousers, a huge array of decrepit boots) from which the actors selected items every day. I asked the actors never to wear their street clothes in the rehearsal room. From the moment they entered, in their ill-fitting clothes, bowler hats on their heads, their characters began to emerge. The actors lived in those clothes. They suffered in those clothes. They danced in those clothes. The clothes ceased to be costumes and became like a second skin. Frank Wood's neck chafed from the rope. Steven Anthony Jones (Pozzo) exhausted himself carrying around the bulk of his fat suit and falling down all the time. They didn't have to pretend to feel these things and they didn't have to understand what motivated the physical circumstance; they merely had to turn up, wear the clothes, live honestly and fully in their given condition, and discover what happened.

Second, I resisted the temptation to spend time at the table analyzing the play. Endless reams of criticism have been written on *Godot*, some of it illuminating, but what becomes blazingly clear from day one is that the play will fail if it is a cerebral exercise. *Godot* is a play about the moment-to-moment experience of rehearsing a play, a play

with no clear plot, endlessly mysterious signposts, and lots of time to fill. It asks actors to confront both the terror and the hilarity of being on stage without knowing why or how. They wonder: what are we waiting for? Is anything ever going to happen in this play? How will we amuse ourselves within it? What if no one listens? What if the audience is indifferent to our efforts, to our jokes, to our suffering? The condition of the characters merges with the condition of the actors in a seamless way that is destroyed if one begins to think symbolically or ask the characters to represent something outside of themselves.

Which is why my third impulse in staging *Godot* was to dispense with any notion of illusionistic scenery. I never asked the actors to believe that they were really in an open field rather than on an open stage. The characters in *Godot* are not really on a road, they are in a theater, co-existing for two-and-a-half hours with an audience that is trapped in the same open-ended experience of *waiting* as the characters. The play is filled with references to hostile audiences and to the theater architecture itself. Gogo tries to escape into the wings, or upstage, only to be reminded by Didi that there is no way out except through the house, that frightening "bog." They long to be "seen" and indeed they long to make the audience laugh, yet at the same time they assume the audience will be hostile and they constantly confront "us" with sardonic comments: "Charming spot"… "Inspiring prospects." They torment us with our own frustrated expectations: "Charming evening we're having/ Unforgettable/ And it's not over./ Apparently not." But they can't escape our gaze. Their only solace is each other.

Before commencing rehearsals of *Godot*, we viewed the recent Gate Theater film of the play. While we admired it enormously, we felt curiously detached as we watched it. I realized the reason afterwards: to my mind, Beckett is less compelling on film because his work is about the *human body* in all its gritty corporeality. It is no coincidence that Giacomo Giacometti, creator of some of the most visceral bodies in modern sculpture, designed the tree for the set of the first Parisian revival of *Godot* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1961. Beckett forces one to confront the ontological, hilarious, painful experience of living in one's own body. He presents the endless collision of thought and activity, until we realize that thought *is* a physical activity requiring the same visceral energy as eating and peeing and "doing the tree." The experience of watching *Godot* is the experience of encountering one's own body in real time while watching highly committed actors in real time experience time passing. We cannot, as audience members, separate ourselves from Didi and Gogo's experience, unless we (in our cowardice!) choose to get up and leave the theater. We experience Pozzo's pain and exhaustion, we recoil from Lucky's drool, we delight in Didi and Gogo's dance. Sometimes we laugh; after all, as Beckett famously commented, "nothing is funnier than unhappiness." But most of all we wait, along with the actors, for something to happen. And that communal waiting is one of the great events of the modern theater. The play is not about something, it is that something itself.

— Carey Perloff

Andonis Vouyoucas: A Greek Director of Godot

Born in Athens in 1939, Andonis Voyoucas studied law before pursuing theatrical training with Vassilis Diamantopoulos at the New Theatre of Athens. After emigrating to France, he studied at the Institut d'Etudes Théâtrales in Paris where, in 1966, he formed his first theatrical company in partnership wit his wife Françoise Chatôt. His many theatrical productions include the major Greek tragedies as well as the plays of Chekhov, Strindberg, Lorca, Claudel, and Beckett. In 1987 he was named co-director, with Françoise Chatôt, of the Théâtre Gyptis, the theater of the city of Marseilles and the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. The following remarks are adapted from the presentation that he made at the roundtable discussion preceding his production of En attendant Godo*t last summer in Roussillon.*

When, as a young man in Athens, I saw my first Beckett play, I was repelled by what I took to be his profound pessimism, and I stopped going to see his plays, or even reading them, for a long time – nearly twenty years. One day, however, my wife suggested that I direct *En attendant Godot* with herself in the role of Lucky. So I went back to Beckett's novels and plays as well as critical and biographical works (analyses that often seemed to impose a single, narrow interpretation, which I thought was fundamentally wrong-headed). When we began our rehearsals of the play, I chose a completely new working method: we

Andonis Vouyoucas joins his actors (Ivan Romeuf, Jacques Germain, Alexis Moati, and Alain Choquet) after a performance of the superb production of En attendant Godot that they brought to Roussillon last summer.

sat around a table with the actors trying to find an association of ideas that fitted each phrase. It was an exhausting process, but at the same time a very enjoyable one because of the surprising ways in which these associations tended to converge with each other.

Rather than restricting the text to an abstract interpretation, we opened it to the free-play of our fantasies: to our personal sufferings as well as our willingness to make light of them. Beckett helped us to rediscover the pleasure of the theater by leading us to become as playful as children once again. At the same time, the text was so rich that we felt that it had somehow eluded us. So my four actors and I decided to continue working on *Godot* for the rest of our lives; we have, in fact, performed it off and on over a period of nineteen years. Each time we discovered something new because we had changed over the years and also because the lived experience of the play had influenced us unconsciously.

Work on Beckett involves, to be sure, more than simply trying to find the hidden meaning of each word through personal associatons. Sometimes an entirely technical kind of approach is needed as, for example, when I asked my actors to count out the rhythm of a line. This allowed us to perform the entire play as though it were a musical composition, while at the same time going down into the depths of its unconscious sources and making use of its magnificent humor, which made us laugh out loud even during rehearsals. We discovered that these extremely precise stage directions allowed us to "play" the text exactly as one plays a piano or any other musical instrument. For some members of the audience, the long silences were a trial; however, I had told my actors not to make any concessions but, rather, to take their work on the play to its logical extreme. We were there, not to please the audience, but to explore the inmost recesses of our souls, into which we had rarely ventured. My greatest pleasure was when young members of the audience, putting aside their initial irritation, would burst into peals of laughter that suddenly freed them from their anxieties and then led them to further reflection.

I remember writing to Beckett to ask if my wife could play Lucky, because I wanted this role to be genderless, with Lucky dressed in a white suit, wearing a smart tie, entirely white-faced, eyebrows very high, and with his famous wig. He gave me his permission because the idea appealed to him. I then worked with the same actors, including my wife, until last summer's performance in Roussillon, nineteen years after the first, when, in clear contradiction to Beckett's expressed wishes, Irène Lindon forbade my wife's playing Lucky. I was so angered by her refusal that I considered canceling the performance. My wife, however, came to the rescue, choosing Alexis Moati as her successor and training him in the purest tradition of the commedia dell'arte while at the same time leading him to create a performance that was entirely his own.

What most distinguishes Beckett's work from Greek tragedy and the theatrical tradition that follows it is that with Beckett we are confronted by a society that — even though it is made up of human couples — is fundamentally characterized by isolation. At the end of Act I, Vladimir says to the child: "Tell him . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . tell him you saw us. (*Pause*.) You did see us, didn't you?" At the end of Act II, however, this changes to: "Tell him . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . tell him you saw me and that . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that you saw me." This social fragmentation — this monstrous isolation of the human individual — is foreshadowed from the beginning of the play by various statements made by the characters, such as Vladimir's "One of he thieves was saved. (*Pause*.) It's a reasonable percentage. (*Pause*.) Gogo." Already, even at the beginning of the play, the human couple is only an illusion. Each individual goes to his damnation, or to his death, alone and without any help. At such moments, Beckett shows that society as a collective entity simply doesn't exist. In Greek tragedy, by contrast, collective values and desires exist, as do communal rituals.

When I think of *Godot*, *Oh, les beaux jours* comes instinctively to mind because Winnie, like the characters in *Godot*, is faced with the question of how to get through a day. For all of them, their days are just a series of repetitive actions which, as Beckett shows, don't amount to anything since the essential always eludes them. Fifteen years ago I created a production of *Oh, les beaux jours*, with my wife as Winnie, in order better to understand *Godot*. Over the years, we have repeatedly discovered ways in which each play enriches our understanding of the other.

I once wrote to Beckett to say that France was, for both of us, a haven in which we had found artists who were ready to consider new ideas as well as audiences that were open to experiments and that accepted our way of looking at the world without any illusions but also — and this is what now strikes me after so many years — without the least sign of pessimism. What I had rejected as pessimism during my youth was, in fact, this great man's lucidity, to which I am now so deeply indebted.

— *Andonis Vouyoucas*
Translated by Thomas Cousineau

Gottfried Büttner: 1926-2002

Many of us who saw Gottfried Büttner at the Beckett in Berlin 2000 Symposium were looking forward to many more meetings with this gentle and caring doctor from Kassel who combined his medical practice and life-long passion for the anthroposophical teachings of Rudolf

Steiner with excursions into literature and art. It was with much sadness that I learned of his death on September 4, 2002, after a year's illness with cancer of the gallbladder. His love for literature and the healing arts was already apparent in his dissertation for his 1953 medical degree, a pathobiography of the poets Christian Morgenstern and Novalis that emphasized the mutual influence of tuberculosis and personality on each other. Not surprisingly, Beckett was to express interest in this topic during their later friendship (392).[1] Similarly, when Büttner sent his 1968 study of the theatre of the absurd to Beckett, in which he aptly portrays him and Ionesco as "seelische Realisten," or "psychic realists" (299), Beckett read the book from cover to cover and offered a few corrections for the second edition (360-62).

A combined medical and anthroposophical focus on the sensual and spiritual (and their mutual influence) was also to inform Büttner's well-received study of *Watt,* which earned him a Ph.D. in English at age fifty-four from the Gesamthochschule Kassel. He was tickled to add this second doctor's hat to his M.D. (368). The English translation of *Samuel Becketts Roman "Watt"* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1981) was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1984. One of the finest studies of *Watt*, it is full of fascinating reports of his conversations with Beckett. Beginning in 1967, Büttner and his wife Marie Renate, also a medical doctor, met with Beckett in Paris or, when Beckett was directing one of his plays in Germany, in Berlin and Stuttgart. Once he visited Beckett in Ussy with one of his six children. Büttner's private record of twelve meetings with Beckett, he tells us in his memoirs, comes to some one-hundred typed pages (321). He shared many of these conversations in his books, essays, and papers at conferences with other Beckettians, along with choice quotations from the one hundred and forty letters or cards he received from Beckett during their twenty or so years of friendship.

At their early meetings, Beckett would ask about Kassel, where as a young man he had visited Peggy Sinclair and her family. When James Knowlson later asked him about Kassel for his biography, Beckett referred him to Gottfried who "knows all about that" (325). One of the humorous anecdotes Büttner tells in his memoirs concerns the "hommage à Schopenhauer" Beckett thought up while directing *Endspiel* in Berlin in 1967: in turning the play's three-legged pomeranian into a poodle he thought to honor the philosopher and his favorite dog (340).

Gottfried Büttner was a much-appreciated Beckettian whose warmth and shared experiences and insights we remember with fondness. Our deepest condolences to his wife Marie Renate Büttner, their six children, and twenty grandchildren.

— *Angela Moorjani*

1. All page references are to Gottfried Büttner's memoirs, *Unterwegs im 20 Jahrhundert* (Dornach, Switzerland: Verlag am Goetheanum, 1997).

MLA 2003

The Samuel Beckett Society organized two panels at this year's MLA convention in San Diego. The stunning ocean views at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, where the events took place, and the hoards of "crritics" anxiously seeking their sessions served as a surreal but nonetheless appropriate backdrop to what proved to be two fascinating and well-attended panels. Participants from America and "beyond the seas" (supplied with their own aspirin) came to listen to established and new scholars presenting innovative approaches to a writer whose *oeuvr*e proved, once again, to be inexhaustible.

The first of the two panels, "Samuel Beckett and Irish Poetry," began with an apology by moderator Vincent Sherry from the St. Augustine Centre, who was replacing Marjorie Perloff. Not a Beckett scholar himself, Sherry gallantly presided over the panel, directing questions and expressing his admiration for the quality of the papers and discussion. David Wheatley (University of Hull), the sole participant in this panel to examine Beckett's poetry in relation to one of his contemporaries, read from his Joycean-titled paper "Slippery Sam and Tomtinker Tim: Beckett and MacGreevy's Urban Poetics," which playfully alluded to Joyce's parody of Beckett and MacGreevy's friendship in *Finnegan's Wake* as well as to Beckett's defense of Joyce's "work-in-progress." Wheatley focused on MacGreevy's embrace and Beckett's rejection of an Irish tradition, explaining that, while MacGreevy's Ireland is a site of national identity and pride, Beckett's is a sewage dump rife with sexual corruption and misery. Whereas in MacGreevy's poetics the reader discovers a longing for purity, both sexual and national, in Beckett's the reader finds only an overwhelming desire for interaction with the female figures in his poems — a desire that repeatedly ends in failure, as is evident in his parodies of childbirth and origins. Wheatley further argued that Beckett's jokes on genealogy reflect his own position as an Anglo-Irish protestant in the Republic of Ireland, while MacGreevy's nationalistic, albeit frustrated, poetic voice and his yearning for purity were a response to the end of colonial occupation in Ireland.

Both Adrienne Janus (Stanford University) and Stephen Watt (Indiana University) examined Beckett's influence on contemporary Irish poetry, with an emphasis on Paul Muldoon and Derek Mahon. In her intriguing paper, "In One Ear and Out the Others: Beckett, Mahon, Muldoon," Janus argued that traces of Beckett's *Trilogy* can be found in the work of both poets. Each uses the *Trilogy*, however, in distinctive ways: Mahon plays with direct allusions and references to Beckett *within* the formal constraints of verse to assist him in his poetic project of softly "banging the bars and banging at the windows" of the human condition, while Muldoon plays with Beckettian sounds to *challenge* these poetic conventions. Their overt references and allusions to Beckett's *Trilogy* led Janus to examine how both poets infuse what she termed "Molloy's ears" into their works. Mahon, in his indirect allusions to Beckett, strives to block out sound by listening harder

to "nameless things" whereas Muldoon pokes holes in poetry and language by listening to "thingless names"; this is especially evident in his poem "Errata," where he creates "mis-hearings."

Stephen Watt illustrated the subject of his talk, "Vespers and Viduity: Samuel Beckett and Paul Muldoon," by distributing a reproduction of Mary Farl Powers' engraving "Emblements," which served as a multifaceted emblem for the way in which Beckett, like the worms devouring the space of the engraving and the cancer infesting Powers' body, infests Muldoon's poem "Incantata." According to Watt, the emblematic destructive path of the Beckettian worm in Muldoon's elegy to Powers (his former lover) gives way to a new system of poetic writing in which boundaries between the host (the poem) and guest (the influence, allusion, or reference) become increasingly difficult to locate.

"It may be the case, as their papers suggest, that Beckett's novels and plays, rather than his poetry, serve as sources of inspiration for Muldoon and Mahon."

Members of the audience found the panel refreshing especially after all the attention over the decades paid to the voices murmuring in Beckett's texts (i.e. Joycean and Shakespearian allusions found in Beckett). In these new examinations of the topic, however, none of the panelists considered how Beckett's *poetry* influenced contemporary Irish poets. It may be the case, as their papers suggest, that Beckett's novels and plays, rather than his poetry, serve as sources of inspiration for Muldoon and Mahon; however, the question as to why they ignore or overlook his poetry needs to be addressed. What in particular is it about his novels and drama which become points of reference?

Raymond Federman (State University of New York, Buffalo) opened the second panel, "Samuel Beckett and Censorship," with general comments about the unforeseen range of approaches the panelists offered on the subject. He also mentioned his own work with Spineless Books (www.spinelessbooks.com) as an attempt to break down the barriers of editorial censorship. Although each panelist examined the issue of censorship in Beckett studies in relation to different texts and issues, all three dealt primarily with Beckett's prose.

In his paper entitled "Beckett's Filthy Synecdoche: The Sadean Subtext in *Murphy*," Richard Begam (University of Wisconsin, Madison) argued that Beckett, despite having turned down the opportunity to translate the Marquis de Sade's *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome,* embedded Sadean references in *Murphy.* Quoting from a letter Beckett wrote to Thomas MacGreevy, Begam explained that Beckett's refusal to translate de Sade's novel stemmed from his own fear of being censored; however, Beckett's apprehension did not keep him from drawing on this work, which he himself acknowledged to be "the most utter filth." Rather it seemed to have propelled him into incorporating an extended, albeit obscured, synecdoche. What attracted Beckett to the novel, Begam explained, was not wholly de Sade's pornographic imagination, but also the mathematical structuring device of the novel, which he analyzed in relation to the episodes in *Murphy* involving Murphy's rocking chair and his five biscuits.

Diane Lüscher-Morata (University of Reading) began her paper, "'It is not me': From a Refusal to Speak of Oneself to X: A Paradigm of Humankind," by defining censorship as pertaining to "strategies of self-denial used by Beckettian narrators, their refusal to attest to their selfhood, which seems to derive from the impossibility of doing so." For Lüscher-Morata, the ensuing crisis culminates in the *Trilogy* and *Texts for Nothing.* Drawing on Paul Ricœur's work on narrative identity, she lucidly argued that Beckett uses the act of self-censorship in his narratives in order to reorient them. The "I" in Beckett's prose fiction is unlocateable because the act of censoring the self allows for multiple speakers to exist. What is revealed through the unfixed "I" is the paradigm of human experience, which entails loss, mourning and the survival of the long-dead. Lüscher-Morata concluded by noting that this "I" completely disappears in such later works as *That Time, How it is* and *Ill Seen Ill Said.* In these narrative spaces, voices from the dead and the past nevertheless question "who" is speaking, a question that continues to be suspended.

Unlike the other panelists, who discussed *self-censorship* in Beckett's work, James McNaughton (University of Michigan), in a paper entitled "Early Beckett's Censorship: 'Echo's Bones,'" examined Chatto and Windus's decision to exclude Beckett's proposed final short story from *More Pricks Than Kicks.* An analysis of this story, which, regrettably, remains unpublished to this day, helps, according to McNaughton, "to address debates on censorship, politics, and sexuality in Beckett's early work" while also helping readers to better understand Beckett's collection of short stories. Examination of the language of Charles Prentice's refusal to publish "Echo's Bones" indicates that, despite the bizarre nature of the story, the publisher clearly understood Beckett's Freudian dreamscape with its allusions to Dante, Ovid's Echo and Narcissus and its biting critique of Fascism and Nazism. As McNaughton rightly pointed out, this story, which echoes, transforms, and even distorts historical events, can aid readers to better comprehend Beckett's attitude towards the rise of fascism in Europe and, briefly, in Ireland.

This panel raised interesting questions, including issues related to why Beckett's Estate continues to practice a kind of censorship of performances. What both panels and the "official" as well as private debates that followed revealed is that despite the nearly 3,000 articles catalogued in the *MLA* database on Beckett, his *oeuvre* remains a fascinating and rich subject of exploration that continues to open new avenues of meaning, thus making it possible for us to "plod on and never recede."

— Katherine Weiss

Current & Upcoming Events

La Maison Samuel-Beckett

The Beckett association in Roussillon has planned an ambitious series of events for this year. On Sunday, May 9, it will sponsor a performance of giant puppets (called "Padox," as befits inhabitants of "Padoxie," their native planet). Presented by the "Compagnie Houdart-Heuclin," this performance will take place at various locations in the village.

For the annual Beckett festival at the end of July, a production of *Fin de partie* by the "Les Ateliers" company of Aix-en-Provence is currently planned. Like last year's production of *En attendant Godot*, this performance will take place in an outdoor theater on the grounds of the former Usine Mathieu, just outside of the village. It will mark the completion of the association's goal of presenting performances of all four of Beckett's major plays. The association's president Henri Vart is also contemplating a stage reading of Alain Fleisher's play "Tour d'horizon." This would be the first in what he hopes will be a series of activities undertaken in cooperation with the neighboring villages of Bonnieux and Goult, where subsequent presentations of this reading will be staged. The festival will also include a roundtable discussion on the topic of "Beckett et la psychanalyse" that will serve as the basis of the next volume of the association's *Cahiers* series, published by Michel Archimbault (the publisher of Didier Anzieu's book on Beckett).

In November, the association will host a workshop sponsored by the Assurance Formation des Activités du Spectacle on a theme still to be decided. Participants in this workshop will be housed in Roussillon and will work in Bonnieux.

Call for Contributions

Samuel Beckett's "Endgame," edited by Mark S. Byron, will be the first volume in "Dialogue," a new series announced by Rodopi Press under the general editorship of Michael J. Meyer. This volume will offer new and experienced scholars the opportunity to present alternative readings and approaches to Beckett's play. The goal of the collection is to establish a dialogue between essays by younger scholars (MA, ABD, six years or less from the PhD, Lecturer, Assistant Professor or equivalent) and those by established or expert scholars (Associate Professor, Professor or equivalent). Essays that address inherently controversial topics are especially welcome. A list of potential topics is available on request from the editor at msb27@u.washington.edu. Inquiries will be fielded and topic proposals considered until 31 May 2004; completed manuscripts (20-25 pages; Chicago style; 2 hard copies in Word) will be due by 1 December 2004.

Drawing on Beckett

Linda Ben Zvi has edited for the Assaph Book Series at Tel Aviv University a volume entitled *Drawing on Beckett: Portraits, Performances, and Cultural Context*s whose opening section presents, for the first time in one volume, twenty-four sketches of Samuel Beckett executed by his good friend, the Paris-based Israeli artist Avigdor Arikha. In addition, there are essays on "Influence, Memory, and Theory" by Mary Bryden, Mariko Hori Tanaka, Shimon Levy, Angela Moorjani, Matthijs Engelberts, Antonia Rodríguez Gago, Julie Campbell, Irit Degani-Raz, and Peter Gidal, as well as studies on "Media and Performance" by Jonathan Bignell, Enoch Brater, Catherine Laws, Everett Frost and Anna McMullan, Colin Duckworth, Seán Kennedy, Eric Prince, Ruby Cohn, Jürgen Siess, Helen Astbury and Véronique Védrenne, and Daniela Caselli. Information on ordering this volume may be found at: http://www.tau.ac.il/arts/.

BOOK REVIEWS

John Haynes and James Knowlson, Images of Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 159 pp. £20.

Samuel Beckett was photogenic, and his scene sets have also been tempting to wielders of cameras. Therefore, I hope it will be useful to begin my review with a brief summary of other books composed largely of photographic images of Beckett and/or his stage sets. The earliest is the most lavish: Eoin O'Brien's *The Beckett Country* (1986), with original photographs by David Davison, as well as contributions by others. At nearly four hundred pages, with over three hundred photographs, a Foreword by James Knowlson, and copious end-notes, the book should more accurately be entitled *A Beckett Country*, since 9 of its 10 chapters focus on Ireland, and the 10th deals with the Irish Red Cross Hospital at Saint-Lô. Although Dr. O'Brien claims to be more interested in topography than personality, he quotes relevant passages of both from Beckett's work. Handsomely produced, the book was offered to Beckett in his 80th year, and it sold for $60.

Enoch Brater's *Why Beckett* (1989) is out of print, but Thames and Hudson has reissued an updated paperback version as *The Essential Beckett*. Brater writes a graceful, noteless text to accompany one hundred and twenty-two photos by various hands. Both text and images move chronologically, and some effort has been made to match the photos to Brater's prose. John Minihan's *Samuel Beckett* (1995) contains sixty-four photographs, which he implies that Beckett authorized. His collection is preceded by a charming essay of Aidan Higgins, which bears little relation to the pictures, of which sixty-two catch Beckett himself in Ireland, London, and Paris. A small format French publication of 1997 is also titled *Samuel Beckett*. A brief chronology (not always correct) is the only text, but the thirty portraits of Beckett represent some of Europe's best-known photographers–Brassai, Cartier-Bresson, Gisele Freund. To the Penguin Series of "Illustrated Biographies," (also small format) Gerry Dukes contributed in 2001 still another *Samuel Beckett*. Dukes's essay acknowledges his debts to the Bair, Cronin, and Knowlson biographies, but he often adds piquant details, such as a photograph of the announcement of Beckett's birth in *The Irish Times*–on April 13, 1906, although Beckett's birth certificate and passports had it wrong. The book consists of some one hundred and fifty pages, with just short of one hundred photographs, some in color. Dukes writes very readable prose, but the photos follow no order that I could discern. At £10 that may be too much to ask.

Now for the volume that I was asked to review. *Images of Beckett* contains sixty-eight Haynes photos, three Knowlson essays, and six black-and-white plates of paintings. Haynes was the official photographer of the Royal Court Theatre, whose productions are therefore liberally represented. Yet the earliest images date from 1969, when Madeleine Renaud brought her French Winnie to the Court. More at home were a rehearsal shot of Bill Gaskill's *Play*, Albert Finney as Krapp, the Magee-Rea *Endgam*e, Magee in *That Time*, and Billie Whitelaw in *Not I* and *Happy Days*. Perhaps Haynes's most striking work is his six shots of Billie Whitelaw in May's walk of *Footfalls*. Then too, "in a matter of moments" during 1973 Haynes snapped Beckett himself at the Court, and these unposed images are among the finest. For some reason, Haynes is generous with shots of Peter Hall's *Godot* at the Old Vic. Haynes carries his camera when he travels, thus catching Natasha Parry's (French) Winnie in Spain and Pierre Chabert's Hamm in Paris. In Berlin Haynes took my favorite among his photos–Billie Whitelaw rehearsing her *Footfalls* walk (not in costume) on the Act II set of *Godo*t, her stoop reflected in the branch of the tree, at the end of which dangles one forlorn leaf.

In London Haynes journeyed from the Court to the Barbican, where Dublin's Gate Theatre brought Beckett's stage plays in 1999 (quite different from the subsequent films). Haynes photographed all the Barbican plays but *Footfalls*, *Quad*, and *A Piece of Monologue*. His shots of John Hurt's Krapp bear a resemblance to Beckett, which I did not see in the flesh. In general, my only adverse comment on Haynes's beguiling photographs is that they beautify certain performances that are only mediocre in my memory.

Knowlson's preface summarizes the strategy of the collaborators: "We have not attempted to make the photographs directly illustrate the texts, but have preferred to set up echoes from one to the other." Such echoes are sometimes clear but more often "afaint afar away over there," to quote from "What is the Word." Knowlson is an expert on the three areas he treats in his essays–Beckett's life, Beckett's response to and use of particular paintings, and Beckett as director. Yet, consciously or not, he seems to address three different kinds of readers.

His brief biography, called "Portrait," is pitched at Beckett neophytes, as it seeks to dispel journalistic myths, e.g. that Beckett was a hermit, wilfully obscurantist, pessimistic, arrogant, or unpolitical. Only once does Knowlson refer in his notes to his own biography, and his examples of Beckett's humor are refreshing. In contrast, his second essay, called "Images of Beckett," offers glimpses into sophisticated art history, which should appeal mainly to scholars. Not only has Knowlson researched every painting that impressed Beckett, but he detects its influence on the playwright's subsequent theater work. The third essay, "Beckett as Director," requires readers who are familiar with Beckett's drama and who are curious about how the playwright directed his plays. If the second essay displays Beckett's debts to painting, the third essay resonates with Beckett's musical direction. To his familiarity with the

four volumes of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Knowlson adds details of rehearsals that he has watched, as well as some original pages on Beckett's debt to silent cinema and its theoreticians. He includes quotations from Beckett's favorite actors, as well as those actors who resisted the playwright's firm hand. Knowlson's own prose is not always musical, with its preponderance of "clearly" and "deeply," but I close with an exemplary sentence: "Sound and silence, immobility and movement all participate in [Beckett's] dynamic theatre of ambiguity, fragility and inexplicability."

— *Ruby Cohn*

David Bradby, Waiting for Godot. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 255 pp. "Plays in Production." Series editor: Michael Robinson). $25.00

David Bradby's contribution to Cambridge University Press's fine series "Plays in Production" is a superb volume on *Waiting for Godot*. Series editor Michael Robinson explains that the aim of "Plays in Production" is to "examine [the] transposition of … major dramatic texts … on to the stage." They focus on the originality and context of each play, its initial and major interpretations, and its place in theater history. Bradby, one of the best critics of contemporary French theater, who teaches at Royal Holloway, University of London, fully meets that challenge with respect to *Godot*. Starting with the premise that *Godot* has changed the theater fundamentally, Bradby provides the reader with so remarkable an amount of information and analysis that henceforth no one will want to teach *Waiting for Godot* without this valuable volume.

Bradby begins with an overview of English and French drama in the early years of the century and with a look at Beckett's own early years. Although he recognizes that Beckett's work "challenges the dominant position of the director" — because for Beckett it is "the playwright, not the director, [who] is the *auteur* of the final, staged, work, every bit as much as he is the author of the play text" — Bradby privileges Edward Gordon Craig's theories throughout—perhaps excessively—to present Beckett's work as illustrative of Craig's concepts.

Among Bradby's most probing and most useful chapters are his analysis of the play itself and his carefully documented reconstitution of the first Paris production and early productions in England, Ireland, and the U.S. He reminds us vividly of the surprising poverty of the initial Blin production at the tiny Théâtre de Babylone; the links between Beckett's startling play and works by Adamov and Ionesco as well as to Artaud and the Surrealists; the state of the English theater, which boasted no subventions but was still subject to censorship; the Miami catastrophe and the astonishing reception of the San Francisco Actor's Workshop production at San Quentin prison.

Most satisfying perhaps are the thirty or so pages devoted to Beckett's own German production of *Godot* and to the text modifications that stemmed from it. Bradby portrays in fine detail Beckett's way of working with his actors as well as his open-ended attitude to his own text and to the stage as the reflection of the needs of the play. "It is a game, everything is a game," Beckett replies to Stefan (Didi) Wigger's request for elucidation, before adding that it is a serious game, "a game in order to survive." Relying heavily on the well-annotated Berlin event and on the *Theatrical Notebooks*, Bradby not only brings *Warten auf Godot* to life for us, but he convincingly demonstrates that the Beckett staging divided *all* productions of *Godot* into before Berlin and after. By staging himself what many have considered the definitive *Godot*, Beckett complicated life for future directors.

The final chapters, which deal with a variety of productions around the world, are less successful. The most thorough discussions relate to Otomar Krejca's 1978 Avignon production, Walter Asmus's work on *Godot* throughout the nineties at Dublin's Gate Theatre, and Luc Bondy's 1999 staging in Lausanne. There is ample information provided for these, but little if any critical evaluation. Bradby limits himself here to the reactions of audiences and critics. Naturally, Bradby saw some performances and not others—but that was true for earlier productions also and did not interfere with a meaningful appraisal.

It is also regrettable that there is no discussion of the video recordings of *Godot* by Asmus, in French and in English. Mysteriously, Bradby limits himself to a laconic "These are the only two video versions authorized by Beckett." But they are much in need of critical assessment. Most surprisingly, there is no mention anywhere, not even in the otherwise useful, appended chronology of "Select Performances," of Mike Nichols's controversial, celebrated *Godot* at New York's Lincoln Center in 1988 with Robin Williams, Steve Martin, F. Murray Abraham, and Bill Irwin.

These small caveats aside, David Bradby's *Waiting for Godot* is a most welcome addition to the abundance of materials available to serious students and teachers of Beckett. It is elegantly written, well presented, and immensely helpful through the wealth of information, insights, and analyses it presents in a very handy format. This amply and always interestingly annotated volume also contains a dozen photographs of eight different productions and several of Beckett's staging sketches.

— *Tom Bishop*

BOOK REVIEWS

Sjef Houppermans, Samuel Beckett & Compagnie. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003. 153 p. 30€.

I was struck, reading this series of apparently isolated pieces, by their deep consistency, as if all the readings of Beckett offered here were connected by secret underground tunnels and passages. When a rapid perusal of the book's cover told me that Houppermans moved from Beckett to Proust, Claude Simon, Robert Pinget, Christian Oster and Gilles Deleuze, I was tempted to say: good company, indeed! And then I was not surprised to see the book begin precisely with *Compagnie* in a humorously titled essay "Compagnie & Cie." What surprised me -–in a very positive sense—was my discovery of one single problematic linking all these essays. *Samuel Beckett & Compagnie*, focuses on the theme of the fall, a theme that is played with, varied, reexamined, adapted to different texts and contexts.

Sjef Houppermans is well known to Beckettians as the rigorous and dedicated chief editor of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* (in which a number of these chapters were published for the first time), an invaluable international publication that has never shirked theoretical investigations in its well rounded thematic issues, almost always illustrated by original photographs taken by Houppermans himself. Besides having published a book on Raymond Roussel (Corti, 1985) and a series of psychoanalytical readings of various literary texts (*Lectures du désir*, 1997), he is the author of superb and alert monographs or collections devoted to authors like Claude Ollier, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Claude Simon who were all associated with the "nouveau roman" and who went on to erect their own literary monuments. Thus it was quite natural that he chose for the cover illustration the famous 1959 photograph that shows Beckett among the writers gathered by the Editions de Minuit.

Precisely because Houppermans is aware of the theoretical stakes implied by his readings, a double axis underpins this short and dense book. We move from explicitly psychoanalytical approaches to the later texts (beginning with *Catastrophe* and *Company)* to a direct confrontation with Deleuze on Beckett; this is the theoretical element. Meanwhile, we have followed the deployment of a deeper grammar of actions all connected with the Fall. This grammar is written in French and would be hard to translate into English. It connects a number of nouns such as: "La Chute…. => Tombe => Deuil => D'oeil => L'oeil où l'image épuise l'Imaginaire => enfin le sujet retombe dans le langage. " An English gloss would be: we move from the initial archetypal Fall to the Tomb, from there to the work of mourning via a number of images capable of purifying the eye until the image is exhausted, and then one falls back into language and a Joycean "re-circulation" of the initial Fall. Houppermans' question becomes "how to fall again, and fall/fail better." Here, an ontological or metaphysical fall reverberates in a discourse that turns failure into success and that ultimately produces a new relationship to language as such. The series of stages thus delineated functions as so many floating signifiers that are articulated and re-connected in reversible assemblages. To understand this better, let us retrace Houppermans' steps.

In "Entrée," he presents *Catastrophe* in the context of its writing and production and shows how it leads to a last, enigmatic and significant gaze on man and on the future, after which he decides to inhabit the "second trilogy" in order to find Beckett's most crucial bearings. In "Compagnie & Cie & Cie," he describes the ramifications left behind by the work of the uncanny in Beckett's *Company.* Going back to Gilbert Durand's work on the Imaginary, Houppermans shows concretely how Beckett's meditation on writing is inseparable from a meditation on the Fall. The Fall begins of course with birth but continues, unabated, during childhood. Beckett thus turns into a quintessentially Mallarmean poet of *disaster,* as Blanchot

New & Forthcoming

- C. J. Ackerly and S.E. Gontarski. *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought.* New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2004. ISBN 0-8021-4049-1. $25.00.

- Badiou, Alain. *On Beckett.* Trans. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano. Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003. ISBN 1-903083-26-5 (cloth). $54.95; ISBN 1-903083-30-3 (paper). $19.95.

- Ben-Zvi, Linda, ed. *Drawing on Beckett: Portraits, Performances, and Cultural Contexts.* Tel Aviv: Assaph Books, 2003. ISBN 965-90625-0-8 (cloth and paper). $35.00; $20.00.

- Blau, Herbert. *Sails of the Herring Fleet: Essays on Beckett.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. ISBN 0-472-11149-3 (cloth). $55.00; ISBN 0-472-03001-9 (paper). $22.95.

- Tsushima, Michiko. *The Space of Vacillation: The Experience of Language in Beckett, Blanchot, and Heidegger.* New York: Peter Lang, 2003. ISBN 0-8204-6253-5. $42.95.

would say. In spite of these references, which include Derrida on "*glas*," Houppermans's critical vocabulary is mostly psychoanalytical, with borrowings from Rosolato, Abraham and Torok, Bellemin-Noël, Marthe Robert and, of course, Anzieu.

After "Chutes sans fin," a chapter that maps out the full extent of the Fall theme, "De la Rampe à la Tombe: Le Roman Familial" confronts Anzieu's thesis squarely. To do so, he rapidly traverses the first trilogy to focus on "First Love." "First Love" offers a "family novel" of Beckett's writerly and disciplined neurosis, less a primal scene than an Other scene in which the figure of Woman, split between Mother and Whore, ends up uniting the two in one function, while Fathers are conveniently absent but nevertheless exert an undeniable power of appeal. The broad framework of such a reading is, on the whole, Lacanian, and never loses sight of the letter of the text: "La mise en série de l'objet du désir selon l'inévitable morcellement inhérent au sujet oblige à prolonger le cheminenement du désir désirant. Au point de rencontre des objets postiches et du désir exaspéré d'étranges figures a-sexuelles se dégagent sur un rythme saccadé. Les textes de Beckett sont des poèmes en prose dans la lignée de Baudelaire parlant d'un spleen en dérive" (36). Moving elegantly between a Lacanian and a Deleuzian thesis, Houppermans connects the effort to exhaust a maternal "imaginary" with the need to fall back on to a symbolic order marked by speech: "Mais cette imaginaire fulguration maternelle, à cheval sur le tombeau et le berceau, ne pourra jamais se figurer que selon ses lignes de retombée dans la symbolization. La vraie parole de Beckett ne cesse d'y émerger pour dire sa chute"(41). A lapsarian epistemology (to use Begam's expression, qtd. 64) underpins a poetics of literary exhaustion.

Very logically, the next chapter is entitled "A Cheval" and focuses on the horses of *More Pricks than Kicks*, a ride or a gallop through the many puns associated with what might be called Beckettian hippophanies, not forgetting the crucial role of the phobic animal for Freud's Little Hans. From the horse we can move to stoats ("hermines" in French) or rats in a chapter that compares two recent books on Beckett by Michel Bernard and Richard Begam. He finds in Michel Bernard a similar hesitation between Lacanian and Deleuzian models, and delivers a very biting (one would expect no less in such a rodent context) criticism of Bernard's tendency to gloss over significant divergences. Is Badiou's work a philosophically oriented way out of the dead-end? I should leave this question for the reader to answer, but it seems to me that in this on-going debate, Houppermans is uniquely situated at the cusp between purely "French" and Anglo-Saxon approaches to Beckett. The same critical acumen exerts itself in the next chapter which examines *Ill Seen Ill Said* with references to books by Evelyne Grossman and Angela Moorjani. In one of the funniest and perhaps deliberate typos of this book, we find in a discussion of "agneaux nouveaux-morts" (instead of "nouveaux-nés," i.e., "just-born lambs") the idea that this sends us to a "Gogotha" (80)! Never had Estragon's hypochoristic abbreviation as "Gogo" in Didi's mouth been used so appropriately to suggest the link between a Michelangelesque crucifixion and the endless "come and go"' of an old woman's climbing her "mount of the skulls."

Houppermans can be a sharp critic, and I fully agree with his reserved assessment of Nicholas Zurbrugg's book on Beckett and Proust. A very competent reader of Proust himself, Houppermans notes very clearly how Zurbrugg's dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism fails to capture either the meaning of Proust's work or its impact on Beckett. He uses his insight into Proustian epiphanies to read *Company* as a thoroughly Proustian text, and shows very compellingly the imporance for Beckett of certain sentences in Proust, such as, "Que le jour est lent à mourir par ces soirs démesurés de l'été! Un pâle fantôme de la maison d'en face continuait indéfiniment à aquareller sur le ciel sa blancheur persistante." (qtd. 97)

In the subsequent chapters, we discover not only Beckett's many literary friendships but also how crucially his work chimes in with that of contemporary French writers. His complicity with Pinget has often been documented but here it yields new insights into *All that Fall*. The links with Claude Simon and Christian Oster have rarely been evinced and prove to be eloquent. These last chapters suggest a deeper impact of Beckett on contemporary French writers, on an even younger generation than the first Editions de Minuit school, with writers like Christian Gailly and Eric Chevillard. They all testify to the fact that Beckett's *oeuvre* has "saved" them from muteness and despair. Finally, the last chapter, "Puits," does not avoid a calculated fall into the well of theory—we know that, since Thales, this is the fate of all theoreticians—but in this case, once we are at the bottom, it seems we can find in Alain Badiou or Simon Critchley two helpers who provide a bucket creaking up along a very rusty chain. Both Badiou and Crichtley duly pay homage to Deleuze while rewriting him completely in their own terms. Which is why, ultimately, the creaking and looping chain should produce some kind of music, hopefully not too far from the melancholy and repetitive strains of Schubert's *Winterreise*.

— *Jean-Michel Rabaté*

BOOK REVIEWS

Samuel Beckett. Les Os d'Echo et autres précipités. Traduit de l'anglais et présenté par Edith Fournier. Paris : Les Editions de Minuit. 59 pp. 9€.

After *Proust*, *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Worstward Ho*, Edith Fournier has taken on the unenviable task of delivering to the French-speaking public a translation of Beckett's first collection of poems, *Echo's Bones*. A short foreword presents the collection and describes the conditions in which the poems were written and originally published. Fournier concludes with a remark on the erudite, polyglot, and intertextual nature of the poetry, which is also the subject of almost twenty pages of translator's notes.

Fournier has been translating Beckett into French for some time now and is aware of the importance Beckett accorded to "fundamental sounds." This awareness can only be heightened in the case of poetry, thus making the task of the translator more daunting. Occasionally, the necessary rhyme or alliteration occurs naturally in the target language without the translator's having to look far for an equivalent: "strangled in the cang" becomes "étranglé par la cangue" in "Enueg I," for example. Similarly, while it appears impossible in this poem to maintain the alliteration and assonance of "skull sullenly" (translated by "mon crâne, sombre"), the next line offers the possibility to compensate, as "clot of anger" becomes "caillot de colère." Other equivalences are not so easy to come by, and Edith Fournier shows considerable resourcefulness, as the following examples illustrate: "the thin K'in music of the bawd" in "Dortmunder" becomes "la menue musique Qin de la maquerelle"; "he pants his pleasure" in "Sanies II" becomes "il exhale son exultation"; "hound the harlots" in "Serena II" becomes "débusque les drôlesses." There are, inevitably, occasions when the sonority of the English is lost: "shall not add to your bounty / whose beauty" in "Alba" for example, or "slow down slink down" in "Serena III." The small number of such losses is a tribute to the talent of the translator.

However, while great attention is paid to the sounds of individual words, this is not always the case with repetitions or syntactical echoes from one line to another. Thus, in the first verse of "Enueg I," the repetitive structures and the two lines beginning with "and" are sacrificed as "and toil to the crest of the surge of the steep perilous bridge / and lapse down" becomes "puis l'effort pour atteindre la crête du pont périlleusement arqué / redescendre." In "Sanies I," the four "nows" of the English version become two "maintenant" and two "ores." This tendency is most marked in the loss of Beckett's prolific use of verbs in the "–ing" form. Thus the first words of the first two couplets in "The Vulture": "dragging […] stooping […]" are translated by "traînant […] il s'abat […]".

Echoes in the word order from one line to another are also frequent, and while a good number of these remain in the French translation, a certain number are inexplicably eliminated. Thus, in "Enueg I," the first and last lines of the fourth verse end with the same word: "Then for miles only wind […] wrecked in wind." Not so in the translation: "Puis pendant des kilomètres le vent seul […] ce naufragé du vent." The "refrain" of "Serena I" is likewise disrupted, as "hence in Ken Wood who shall find me […] but in Ken Wood / who shall find me" is translated as "alors qui me débusquera à Ken Wood […] mais à Ken Wood / qui me débusquera".

Such modifications of the syntax sometimes appear to be an effort to elucidate a difficulty. These poems are indeed difficult, but one would prefer the explicitation to be limited to the notes. This is not always the case, and certain of Beckett's syntactic choices are "clarified" by his translator. Thus in "Serena II," "the asphodels come running the flags after" becomes "les asphodèles s'en viennent à la poursuite des pavois," and in "Les Os d'Echo," "courant la boulimine du sens et du non-sens" translates "the gantelope of sense and nonsense run."

The tendency to explicitate is not limited to such corrections; rather, Edith Fournier often adds words in order to make our reading easier. These additions may, however, somewhat change our reading of a poem. In "Enueg I" for example, "Exeo in a spasm […] from the Portobello Private Nursing Home" becomes "Exeo en proie à un spasme […] loin de la clinique privée de Portobello."The most striking examples are in the translation of "Serena II,"where "seesaw she is blurred in sleep" becomes "souffle saccadé, la chienne sombre dans un sommeil troublé" and "this damfool twilight threshing in the brake" becomes "ce crépuscule, folle brebis qui se débat dans les buissons." The French translation may be easier to understand on a first reading, but surely the translator's role is not to facilitate comprehension. This, however, appears to motivate a number of translation choices, of which one of the most surprising is the decision to punctuate the poems.

The insertion of punctuation where there was none, or next to none, in the original, has, among other consequences, that of imposing one interpretation where the original allowed ambiguity to remain. "I see main verb at last" in "Sanies I" is a case in point. In the French, this sentence becomes "je vois, verbe de la principale enfin." While such loss of ambiguity is often inevitable in translation (the possible double meaning of "sheet" in "Alba" and "Da Tagte Es" for example), the decision to punctuate seems a deliberate step to render the poems more accessible.

The translation of references and connotations also poses problems. The reader of "The Vulture" cannot help but recognize the reference to Matthew 9:6 in the lines "stooping to the prone who must / soon take up their

life and walk." It does indeed seem difficult to maintain the reference to the different French translations of this Biblical verse, such as "Prends ton lit et va dans ta maison" or "Lève-toi et marche," but the version Fournier proposes has no obvious Biblical echoes: "il s'abat sur ceux qui gisent mais qui bientôt / devront reprendre le cours de leur vie"; nor do the notes at the end mention the reference in the original. They also remain silent on Fournier's choice to translate "sodden packet of Churchman" in "Serena II" by "toute détrempée une boîte de Jouvence de l'Abbé Soury." One understands that this decision is motivated by the desire to maintain, at all costs, the idea of a man of the Church. While this aspect is undeniably important, the translation introduces the notion of waters of youth, which had been entirely absent from the original and which seems slightly incongruous in the context. Another choice which appears difficult to justify, unless it is simply a typing mistake, is the translation, in "Sanies II" of "Lord have mercy upon / Christ have mercy upon us / Lord have mercy upon us" by "Seigneur aie pitié *de nous*, / Christ aie pitié de nous. / Seigneur aie pitié de nous" (our italics).

There is at least one case of mistranslation suggesting either a lack of comprehension on the part of the translator or simply slapdash work. In the lines from "Euneg I," "Then because a field on the left went up in a sudden blaze / of shouting and urgent whistling and scarlet and blue ganzies […]," Beckett's choice of spelling should not mislead one as to the sense of "ganzies." Any dictionary of Hiberno-English, not to mention the *OED*, contains "gansey", meaning "jersey, "referring here to the colour of the jerseys worn by the hurlers. Edith Fournier's translation is: "Puis parce qu'un pré sur la gauche s'embrasa, soudain flamboiement / de cris et de coups de sifflet pressants et *d'oiseaux* écarlates et bleus" (our italics).

French Beckett scholars have waited over sixty years for a translation of *Echo's Bones*. It is undeniably useful to have a French version of these early poems and the notes that accompany them. However, a bilingual edition might have been more useful in that it would have armed scholars against false interpretations induced by mistranslation.

— Helen Astbury

John Fletcher. About Beckett: The Playwright and the Work. London: Faber and Faber, 2003. 230 pp. £8.99.

As a master dramatist, Beckett is regularly anthologized in such college textbooks as *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* and *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Yet there are not many secondary studies that are sensitive to the needs of those who teach Beckett's plays and of the students who read them. John Fletcher's new "one-stop" book offers timely assistance not only to these teachers and students, but to those who wish to know more about the playwright and his work. Fletcher has written a highly readable book, one that focuses on Beckett as a dramatist, on the intellectual and cultural context in which his plays were written, and on his activities as a director. The book begins appropriately with a succinct introduction to Beckett's life, highlighting some of the most important dates, people, and events in his life, including his excellent academic record, his friendships with Georges Pelorson, Thomas McGreevy, James Joyce, and Roger Blin, and his active involvement in the French Resistance. Admittedly, it is not easy to summarize a life as long and as multicultural as Beckett's (involving Ireland, Germany, France, England) in eleven pages but, to Fletcher's credit, he aptly presents that long trajectory intelligibly if sketchily.

Having taken care of "Beckett the man," Fletcher then goes on to illuminate the literary and cultural context of Beckett's plays. He first outlines the historical moment of the appearance of Beckett's plays, a moment characterized as coinciding with "the final flowering" (18) of Modernism and the beginning of Postmodernism. He suggests that it is within the larger context of this postmodern revival to which Theater of the Absurd is affiliated that we must situate Beckett's plays. Beckett's contribution to Absurdism, parallel to those of Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov, is his development of a "metatheatre" (19) that transformed the moral, ethical, and religious planes that preoccupied earlier playwrights. This metatheatrical realm, "where the illusory is opposed to the real, the mask to the face, the stage to the auditorium, and above all the smile was juxtaposed to the tear" (20), is the natural home of the mixed genre called "tragicomedy" through which the indeterminate nature of language and reality is unveiled.

In the next chapter, Fletcher divides Beckett's dramatic career into "six broad phases" (31), starting from *Le Kid*, co-written with Georges Pelorson and ending with *What Where* (1984). He goes on to depict the premieres of *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Roger Blin in Paris and by Peter Hall and Alan Simpson in London, and describes performances in other countries, such as Poland, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The response to *Waiting for Godot* was predictably mixed, with fellow playwrights being more enthusiastic than the press. The next big event was the premiere of the French version of *Endgame*, which turned out to be a "semi-fiasco" (43), followed by a more successful performance of the English version, together with *Krapp's Last Tape*. Many questions were asked about the meaning of these three plays, since no one interpretation seemed to fit neatly. Beckett, as we know, was no help

to the perplexed commentators and when asked "what does the play [*Waiting for Godot*] mean?" simply said: "it means what it says" (45). Beckett's refusal to offer hints to the interpretation of his plays derives from his long-standing belief that the author does not "possess privileged insight or knowledge not revealed to other mortals" (48), and in this sense, the interpreters are pretty much left on their own.

In a Chapter entitled "Survey of Interviews Given by Beckett," Fletcher presents a digest of interviews abridged from published sources. As is well known, Beckett was self-effacing about personal matters and taciturn about his work and because of this any remarks he made about his plays and any recollections of him by others become valuable frames of reference. The selected interviews include ones conducted by Fletcher himself, as well as by academics, journalists, and fellow writers. When an author tends to be silent about the meaning of his work the few things he does say about his plays, such as those recorded in these interviews, become especially valuable even if they are not totally reliable.

Fletcher's chapter on Beckett's experience as a director illuminates yet another aspect of Beckett's relationship with theater. As Fletcher shows, Beckett, who wanted his plays to be performed in exactly the way he wrote them, found that no one, with the possible exceptions of Roger Blin and Alan Schneider, could achieve a faithful translation of texts into performance. So, little by little, Beckett started intervening in his productions, usually by getting the directors and actors/actresses to do things in his way. Beckett's involvement with directing naturally led to his collaboration with theater people. Appropriately, then, Fletcher devotes the last chapter to a digest of interviews with these theater professionals, who include Beckett's favorite directors, Roger Blin and Alan Schneider, favorite actor and actress, Rick Cluchey and Billie Whitelaw, as well as Barbara Bray. The interviewees' feelings about Beckett vary: while some, such as Billie Whitelaw and Jack MacGowran, enjoyed working with him, others, including Brenda Bruce, found him nasty and dehumanizing. Drawing upon his superb command of Beckett scholarship, Professor Fletcher has written a remarkably learned and lucid book, one that provides a valuable reference to teachers, students, and lovers of Beckett.

— Lidan Lin

Presidential Message

Already many Beckett activities are being planned for 2006. The Centenary Year promises to be a memorable and diverse celebration of the writer who provides the basis for this Society. This commemoration belongs to no one in particular, and events associated with it will be truly international in character. Some Beckettians are planning conferences, colloquia, or smaller-scale seminars. Others are considering publications and exhibitions to coincide with the Centenary, or are visiting their local theatres to enquire whether their planning team is considering including a Beckett production in their programme schedule for 2006.

Clearly, it is in everyone's interest to ensure that regrettable clashes in the scheduling of such events are avoided to the extent that they can be. Clashing or overlapping events are likely dramatically to reduce potential participation. To this end, it seems desirable to keep some kind of ongoing calendar of Centenary activities. The benefits of this would be twofold: first, it would enable dates to be registered and publicised in advance, to maximise notice; second, it would enable organisers to check out what events have already been planned, so that they could at least consider avoiding these dates.

Could I, therefore, invite anyone involved in planning Centenary events to email to me the details (BrydenKM@Cardiff.ac.uk)? If you wish, these could be publicised in the next *Beckett Circle*; at the very least, they will serve as a point of reference for enquirers (many of whom approach the Society with general and/or specific queries about upcoming events). Even if the dates and exact venue of your commemoration remain uncertain, it would still be useful to receive a preliminary notice of intention.

While looking ahead to 2006, it is important, nevertheless, to give full weight to ongoing activities. At the time of writing, I have just returned from a fascinating and impressively organised Conference at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität, Düsseldorf, on the subject of "Beckett and German Culture." We hope that the next issue of the *Circle* will carry a report of this conference, as well as confirmation of the forthcoming Beckett panel meetings at MLA 2004, in Philadelphia. One of these has just taken shape. Its topic is "'Know Happiness': Beckett and Joy," and the speakers will be Marion Fries-Dieckmann, "'We Do it to have Fun Together': Beckett Directing in Germany"; John Paul Riquelme, "Joy or Night: Beckett's Untimely Rocky Voice," and Stéphane Pillet, "Happiness and Humor in Beckett." 2006 will no doubt feature many aspects of joying in Beckett; it may be presumed that this panel will provide an apt prefiguration.

— Mary Bryden

Contributors

- Porter Abbott's second book on Beckett is *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph*. He runs the *Samuel Beckett Endpage* website and is a former president of the Samuel Beckett Society. His most recent book is *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*.
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- Robert Bennett is a professor of English at the University of Delaware and coordinator of the Samuel Beckett Festival. A specialist in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, he is the author of *Romance and Reformation: The Erasmian Spirit of Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure"* (University of Delaware Press, 2000).
- Tom Bishop, a former president of the Samuel Beckett Society, is Florence Gould Professor of French Literature and Director of the Center for French Civilization and Culture at New York University. His most recent book is *From the Left Bank: Reflections on the Modern French Theater and Novel*.
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