



# THE BECKETT CIRCLE LE CERCLE DE BECKETT

Newsletter of the Samuel Beckett Society

## Beckett Festival in Madrid

This oddly named theatre—Teatro de la Puerta Estrecha (The Narrow-Door Theatre)—is one of the alternative theatres that enrich and enliven the cultural life of Madrid. Located in one of the most emblematic parts of the city centre, it attracts a diverse public and offers a meeting-place for theatregoers, directors, actors, students, and anyone else who is interested in the theatre. The company responsible for the challenging project of producing a Beckett cycle throughout an entire year is called La Pajarita de Papel (The Little Paper Bird). This company was founded in 1982 by a group of actresses and a few actors under the direction of the Argentinian-born director Rodolfo Cortizo. Even though the company began in the 1980s, it did not acquire its own space until November 2004. This small theatre seats about fifty people within a black-painted room in which the stage and the seating almost overlap with each other. Outside the black-box-like room, there is a very pleasant foyer where people chat, read books, or simply wait for the play to begin or for the actors to appear after the performance.

The theatre began its first program with a cycle dedicated to Samuel Beckett that ran

from September 2004 through July 2005. This project was innovative, but also risky in the sense that Beckett's plays, although never lacking audiences, are usually far from attracting the attention of the public at large, especially in Spain. Along with two of his best-known plays, *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, this cycle included some of Beckett's short plays, which are seldom performed here. This was doubtlessly the most complete selection of Beckett's theatre presented in Spain to date. Cortizo directed his actors and actresses in *Final de partida* from September to December; in *La Última cinta de Krapp* and the reading of *El final* during January and February; in a production entitled *Voces femeninas*, which included *Nana*, *Pasos*, *Ir y venir* and *Yo no* during March and April; in another production called *Voces masculinas*, which included *Fragmento de Teatro I* and *II* and *Solo* during March and April. Finally, from May through July, the company put on *Esperando a Godot*. In addition to these productions, the company published some booklets with information about the plays and participated in informal meetings to discuss topics related to Beckett and their performances of his plays.

The Pajarita de Papel undertook this project because of their previous experience with Beckett's theatre and their growing fascination with the stage language *written* into the texts of Beckett's plays. In 1995, Cortizo was commissioned to direct Beckett's *Esperando a Godot* by El Teatro de la Cabra," which is one of the pioneering alternative theatres in Madrid. Since it was summertime, he decided to present the play outdoors in a small square located next to the theatre. The experiment of offering audiences an outdoor theatre in the midst of the city's



La Pajarita de Papel's director Rodolfo Cortizo played Krapp in his production of *La Última cinta de Krapp*.

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hot and sultry nights was such a success that it is now repeated every summer. Interestingly, a different production of *Esperando a Godot* was staged at the same venue in Summer 2003. Aside from this commission, Cortizo directed Beckett "seriously," as he says, for the first time in 2000, when he used his own company to produce *Final de partida*. The play was performed, first, at the French Institute in Madrid and then at La Fábrica de Pan, a former bakery that had been turned into a theatre. In 2002, this production was mounted again as part of a brief cycle of Beckett's theatre at Lagrada, another small theatre that opened about five years ago in Madrid.

The company's production of *Final de partida* followed Beckett's stage directions almost to the letter. However, the members had to overcome the problems posed by the lack of a suitable published translation by asking for the translation rights from the Beckett Estate and having the play newly translated by Eva Varela, a member of the company who also played the role of Nell. Even though the original text was the version published by Faber & Faber, the translation was modified and cut during rehearsals. To the director's astonishment, most of the changes made to the text during the rehearsal period coincided with Beckett's own revisions and corrections, which appear in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol. II*. From the beginning, the company was particularly interested in Beckett's poetic language, but they later became equally fascinated with his skill as a director of his own plays.

The same version of *Final de partida* opened this cycle with the same cast of actors and actresses. The major change to be noted was the claustrophobic, circular, greyish set that enclosed the characters, which was inspired by the paintings of Antonine Tàpies. The importance of the plastic arts for this company was especially evident in their approach to Beckett's plays. The set, props, and costumes evoked a sort of surrealist postcard of "the old days" in some unspecified place. This production aimed at achieving a balance between tragedy and comedy, although in Beckett the difference between the two is often blurred by the grotesque. As the program notes for *Final de partida* explained: "In a comic and tragic way, Beckett presents human beings as atrophied, paralysed, almost entirely useless, and nearly dead. And simultaneously, he reveals to us in a grotesque way that only human beings know how lucky they are to be alive."

Cortizo directed himself in *La Última cinta de Krapp* which followed *Final de partida* in the cycle. He preceded this performance with a stage reading of Beckett's short prose work, *El final*, which functioned as an anticipatory echo of the Krapp to come. In keeping with his intention of paying tribute to Beckett, Cortizo selected the revised text for this production. After sorting out the translation and directing rights, the company asked me to do a new translation based on the version published in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol. III*. Although some spectators regretted the deletion of Krapp's singing, most of them favored this revised view of Krapp as a less clown-



Eva Varela, Marta Valentín, and Sayo Almeida performed in La Parjarita de Papel's production of *Ir y venir*.

ish and more frugal theatrical work. According to Cortizo, this version "emphasises the love story Krapp searches for in his tapes. It also attempts to correct the clownish turn given to this play by previous directors, which has the effect of eliding the depths of this play."

The rehearsal process was also very interesting since Cortizo worked as though he were an actor being directed by Beckett himself. All the cuts, revisions, and modifications made to the text were respected as well as the addition of a second stage space that allowed Krapp to have somewhere to go during his exits. Moreover, Cortizo acted out all the detailed movements, gestures, and facial expressions that Beckett had stressed in his notebooks. With respect to the set, the company maintained their taste for evoking images of decrepit places and past times: an old wooden table and chair, an old tape-recorder and microphone, dirty cardboard boxes, an old pocket watch, and Krapp's own worn-out clothes are just some examples. The lighting, which created a dream-like atmosphere, also divided the stage into light and darkness.

The cycle continued with two productions of Beckett's shorter plays, *Voces femeninas* and *Voces masculinas*. The fact that the production of Beckett's shorter plays came next helped to display his theatrical development in a way that had never been done before in Spain. Above all, the director paid attention to the projection of light onto a darkened stage in order to highlight the silhouettes and dismembered bodies of Beckett's later theatre. The production of *Female Voices* was particularly challenging from a technical point of view. However, the company overcame the difficulties posed by these plays with a mixture of imagination and craftsmanship. In *Pasos*, for instance, a sort of cloth placed above the actress directed the beam of light so that the required visual effect could be achieved. Even though that additional element seemed disturbing at first, the audience adapted to its presence almost immediately.

All the critics agreed that the work of the actresses

was superb. The only flaw in *Female Voices* was caused by technical limitations. Since the four plays were performed without an intermission, the audience could not leave their seats. Instead of using blackouts, which may have been a more satisfactory procedure, Cortizo created a transition by inventing a character who utters some incongruous remarks. Although this new element did not reduce the impact of Beckett's short plays, especially *Yo no*, the production would obviously have been much better without it. Another change, this time due to limited space, was that of the placement of the actresses on stage and the elimination of the Auditor in *Yo no*.

In keeping with this production's goal of fidelity to Beckett, Eva Varela translated the revised text of *Godot* published in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol. I*. However, the actors did not follow the "choreography" that Beckett had meticulously introduced in relation to the tree and the stone. The actors playing the roles of Didi and Gogo tended, rather, to move around the stage in an excessive, and perhaps unnecessary, manner. Aside from this problem, the actors' performance was enthralling. The program notes for *Godot* reproduced a letter Beckett wrote to Michel Polac in 1952 regarding the four characters he had created in the play. This letter ends with the line "they and I have finished." Ironically, Beckett never truly said "farewell" to his characters since he was continuously involved with the direction of *Godot*. The program notes showed this contradiction and explained the company's artistic proposal based upon "the revision that Beckett himself made to the text from a director's perspective." Indeed, this was the major strength of this cycle, along with allowing the audience to see a group of plays that is highly representative of Beckett's theatrical development. This perspective on Beckett as a director of his own plays is unprecedented in Spain. In spite of the lack of financial support, the Pajarita de Papel company was entirely committed to this project, which offered us a fascinating series of plays and brought Beckett closer to new audiences. Hopefully, other theatres will follow their example.

— Cristina Cano-Vara

## Play and Not I at the Battersea Arts Centre

Battersea Arts Centre has an established reputation in the London fringe for producing cutting-edge theatre and a

particular interest in reaching young audiences. I was therefore pleased to see two of Beckett's most demanding plays staged by a cast of young actors and directed by Natalie Abrahami, an equally young and talented director. In 2005, she received the JMK Award (established in memory of James Menzies-Kitchin, a young and promising theatre director who died suddenly at age twenty-eight in 1996). This allowed her to stage her own production of plays that are rightly viewed by the theatre community as modern "classics." The production was faithful to the text and yet found new things to say in performance. Unless young theatre practitioners are allowed to take risks with reinterpreting Beckett's texts, there is a danger that Beckett's drama will become the ossified, "deadly theatre" of yesterday (Peter Brook's term), rather than texts that speak with passion to contemporary audiences.

*Play* was a very Gothic production in the small Studio 1 Theatre at BAC, rendered more minimalist and sepulchral by removing the regular rows of seats. Amid a haze of cold mist (dry ice), we had to walk to our "platform," past the looming, obscured, bulks of the figures in urns: no precise details discernible in the darkness. There was a strongly organic feel to these figures that made me think of the alien nurseries in the *Alien* film series, though a more likely influence was Anthony Minghella's film of *Play*. (Abrahami remarked to me later that she and the designer were trying for an effect reminiscent of Giacometti, with the urns "encrusted with the passage of accumulated time"). The urns were massive in their own right and directly in front of our seating, while the atmosphere was claustrophobic and tense. The spotlights that illuminated each figure came from the floor beneath our raised-platform seating area, which made us feel like an audience invited in to watch the figures suffering (though for an unknown reason); this reminded us how often Beckett chooses to problematise the audience's relationship with his drama. Emphasizing the central importance of stage-lighting to the two plays was in fact one of the aims of the director, who wanted "to acknowledge that Beckett was a great innovator in terms of modern stagecraft and stage lighting. His thinking was always state of the art, if not in advance, in terms of the practical limits of what could be done with the technology then available." One consequence of the dry ice that filled the auditorium was that it made the light seem almost solid, thus invoking the materiality which was a keynote for this production. Overall, there was a strong sense of set design by Colin Richmond and of inventive lighting by Katharine Williams.

## 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://www.ua.ac.be/beckett>

Or by contacting Dirk Van Hulle ([dirk.vanhulle@ua.ac.be](mailto:dirk.vanhulle@ua.ac.be)). The Endpage contains the official homepage of the Samuel Beckett Society.



Natalie Abrahami's production of *Play* seemed to contain visual echoes of Anthony Minghella's film version.

John Hopkins (M), Amanda Drew (W1), and Anna Hewson (W2) were as grey as the urns they seemed part of. All gave sensitive and nuanced performances, perhaps a little more emotional than in many presentations of the play. Anna Hewson grew increasingly unhinged as the rejected other woman, while Amanda Drew was a mask of pain due to her husband's betrayal. John Hopkins was at turns melancholic, bemused, weary, and sometimes self-satisfied, bordering on the point of egotism. Perhaps a little surprisingly, they spoke in the clipped tones of the upper-bourgeoisie of the 1950s with pursed lips. I wondered if this was an indication that the combined anguish of an eternal triangle now seems historically distant to contemporary audiences, depending as it does upon the contradictory tensions between love as driven simultaneously by absolute selfishness and absolute selflessness, much as in the film *The English Patient*? But then again, Beckett's eternal triangle is often a particularly tawdry one and hardly the grand stuff of *Tristan and Iseult* – this is why the play's emphasis on materiality is important. Perhaps a simpler answer is that Beckett's mesmeric language is so much of that time and milieu that it forces the actors to speak their lines with certain kinds of intonations. One effect, though, of the actors' performances, especially Hopkins', was to bring out the humour in *Play*, especially the hiccups (odd in a purgatorial after-life), while retaining the bitter sense of isolation. This eternal triangle is only to be experienced individually and in the past. The second half did not sound or feel noticeably faster than the first; if anything, the figures just seemed more exhausted, with less energy than before, on their very individual roads to nowhere.

*Not I* ran directly on from *Play* without any interval (the figures in the urns remained on stage throughout) and a moment of further performative linkage was provided by one of the spotlights slowly, almost playfully, traversing the faces in the urns, then edging its way up to the top back centre of the auditorium (as seen from our posi-

tion in the audience). The spotlight in the role of inquisitor also structurally linked both plays and, as Abrahami observed to me, "The light's 'playfulness' is what a bored torturer might do when looking around for another victim." *Not I* then erupted, with Mouth (Lisa Dwan) as a tiny, bright, fiery set of lips and teeth, who seemed much higher and further away than she actually was. If *Play* was Gothic and felt material and tomb-like, then *Not I* felt in contrast much more sublime, a liberating if tormented, angelic outburst from on high. The production made a very interesting use of

"found" differences of mass, space, and distance between the two plays in this theatre. Dwan's delivery in her native Irish accent was excellent; it managed to make sense, while yet possessing a haunting melody. To obtain the necessary image, the bikini clad Dwan (not, of course, visible to the audience) was apparently strapped into the tiny, sweltering light-box of the theatre and her mouth illuminated by the fiercest and most precise light that they could find: a Dedo film light that can illuminate the second hand of a ticking clock one hundred feet away. The strength of the light and reflections from surrounding surfaces made it seem as though Dwan was wearing luminous lipstick. She described playing Mouth ("it is the female Hamlet") to me in memorable fashion later as "like driving down a motorway the wrong way without a handbrake." I found her performance as Mouth moving (especially for an actor still in her late twenties) and visually very striking, verging on the edge of transcendence.

In linking the two plays as this production did (forty-five minutes overall), it is certainly possible for us to worry about the figures in their urns from *Play* remaining on stage throughout *Not I*, and the loss of the auditor from *Not I*. (Perhaps the audience or the figures in their urns were intended to take his place? In fact, Abrahami later confirmed to me that her intention was for the urn figures to be the auditors). However, in terms of the director's interpretation, what was being explored performatively in an intelligent fashion was that *Not I* could be seen as a kind of distillation of *Play*, stripped down to just one isolated figure. But also as a kind of counter-response, producing energy and intensity out of live torment, rather than being repetitively trapped to revisit the shadows of torment past. At first blush, this seems a strange notion, perhaps because productions do not normally evoke that odd conjunction of the bodily material on the one hand and the spiritual on the other that is central to Beckett's theatrical world. As we filed out from the theatre, past the frozen presences of the urn-bound figures and the still

fading orange after-image of Mouth, I couldn't help but be reminded of one of Beckett's more mysterious lines from *Eh Joe*: "spirit into light."

— Steven Barfield

Thanks to my Beckettian companions for the evening who contributed to this review: Tom Mansell, Jessica Boyd, Colette Meacher, and Mikkel Anstrup.

## Beckett at Cerisy

Celebration of the 2006 Beckett centenary began with un-Godot-like haste this summer with a ten-day conference at the 17<sup>th</sup> century chateau of Cerisy-la-Salle, located in the Cotentin region of France, not far from Mont St. Michel. Cerisy has been a legendary meeting-place since it took over the "Décades de Pontigny" begun in 1910 by Paul Desjardins shortly after he had purchased the former Cistercian Abbey at Pontigny. In 1952, his daughter, Anne Heurgon-Desjardins, restored the chateau at Cerisy and, with the help of "Les Amis de Pontigny-Cerisy," continued her father's work. Over the past fifty years, it has hosted more than three-hundred conferences. Photographs of previous participants – including Jean Paulhan, André Gide, René Girard, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida – covered the walls of the foyer, instilling in us a high sense of purpose. Throughout the conference, we enjoyed the exceptional hospitality of Mme. Heurgon-Desjardins' daughters, Edith Heurgon and Catherine Peyrou, and of Jacques Peyrou. Catherine de Gondillac patiently and good-humoredly attended to all of the practical details of our visit.

Those of us who knew of Cerisy only by reputation—as an institution made famous by its prestigious conferences—were disarmed by the warm, "familial" atmosphere that was created by its gracious and accommodating staff. Participants were housed either in the chateau itself or in its converted stables. Meals—accompanied by generous quantities of wine as well as the local hard cider and delicious regional cheeses – were served family style in a dining room that, three times a day, became an animated and convivial meeting place for all. The fact that, of the approximately seventy participants, only half were Beckett specialists added to the distinctive ambiance created. The others—psychologists and psychoanalysts, painters, school teachers, etc.—came for the intellectual stimulation promised by the conference's subject and the natural beauty of the site. Angela Moorjani spoke for all of us when she said that she had had no idea that so many of those attending would not be Beckett specialists and how enriched she felt by her conversations with them.

The organizers of the conference (Tom Cousineau, Sjeff Houppermans, Bogdan Manolovic, Yann Mével, Maurice Pergnier, Michèle Touret, and Gisèle Valency-Slakta) had met in Paris over a two-year period to arrange details of the conference. Their decision to invite all participants to present an hour-long "conférence," rather than restricting this invitation to a small group and consigning the other participants to roundtable discussions, was especially appreciated by the group. This format fitted perfectly with

the leisurely rhythm that is a hallmark of Cerisy; each day had, on average, four papers, followed by lengthy discussions that allowed for a much more prolonged focus on each topic. This atmosphere also contributed to the younger Beckettians' feeling that the senior scholars were much more "sympa" and "abordable" than they had expected. It was a special pleasure for those of us belonging to the latter category to meet with young scholars – from England, France, Switzerland, Japan and elsewhere-- whose papers were an encouraging sign of publications to come.

Each day was organized around a particular theme. "Présence de Beckett dans l'histoire" included papers on Beckett's relation to surrealism, his reception in Russia and in Iran, the Italian background (Dante, Petrarque, and Leopardi), and Beckett's German diaries. "Présence de Beckett entre deux langues" offered reflections on Beckett's use of French and English throughout his *oeuvre*, the particular case of *Mercier et Camier*, Beckett's return to English in *Krapp's last Tape* at the same time that he was translating *L'Innommable*, self-translation as an attempt to recover the originary conception of the text, and Beckett between an illusory and a "new" word. "Présence du corps chez Beckett" examined wandering bodies in



Françoise Simon enthralled the audience with her Winnie-  
esque performance of *L'Innommable*.



Tom Cousineau and Michèle Touret were members of the conference's "comité scientifique," which also included Sjef Houppermans and Yann Mével.

*The Lost One*, the body and the uncanny in *Krapp's Last Tape*, and the dismantling of sacrificial rituals in *Waiting for Godot*. "Présence philosophique de Beckett" explored Giorgio Agamben's relevance to Beckett's portrayal of exclusion, Deleuze's concept of the "image de la pensée," philosophical and psychoanalytical perspectives on "la conscience double," and Beckett and film.

"Présence de Beckett dans le polylogue des arts" considered bilingualism in Beckett's plays, the relationship between his fiction and his plays, his "parasitic" use of citations, and the dynamics of paradox in his dramatic monologues. "Présence de Beckett dans la recherche esthétique" gathered papers on the computer-assisted genetic study of his manuscripts, stroboscopic effects of movement and stasis in his writing, the shift from an enclosed to a limitless world as a characteristic feature of his modernity, fugal elements in *Ohio Impromptu*, and the place of the "event" in his work. "Présence et représentation chez Beckett" included analyses of Beckett and Thomas Bernhard, the confluence of the mythological figure of Echo and contemporary audio technologies in Beckett's work, his disruption of representation, and Kleinian and Lacanian perspectives on *Molloy*. Finally, "Présence de Beckett auprès de ses continuateurs" looked at Charles Juliet's meeting with Beckett, traces of Beckett in the work of Raymond Crousse, "déterminants flous," and conflicting responses to Beckett among the new generation of playwrights.

An interest in psychoanalytical perspectives as well as attempts to interpret Beckett's work against the background of traumatic historical events emerged as the most noted tendency

Technical problems with his reel-to-reel tape recorder required that Sjef Houppermans resort to an unorthodox alternative.

among the papers. Rather surprisingly -- given the almost unanimous presence of French Beckettians -- the relationship between Beckett and the French literary tradition was not a center of interest. The proceeding of the conference will appear sometime in 2006 as a volume of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*.

Several evenings were devoted to Beckett-related performances that had been arranged by Bogdan Manojlovic. These included a presentation of music and poems inspired by Beckett offered by composer-musician Ayser Schmid-Vançin, a striking and affecting stage version of selections from *L'Innommable* presented by the actress Françoise Simon, and a reading of texts (*Dis Joe*, *Berceuse*, and *Bing*) in which Françoise Simon was joined by the actress Edith Garraud. Piotr Kajdasz, a violinist with the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne who had accompanied one of the conference's participants, treated us to an impromptu, and beautifully rendered, performance of J. S. Bach's *Partita No. 2* in the library of the chateau. Midway through the conference, an entire day was devoted to "Présence des Beckettians en Normandie," which included the traditional excursion to Mont St. Michel. Participants -- approaching this celebrated landmark by way of a two-hour walk along the adjoining bay--had the uncanny experience of walking through a landscape in which sea, land, and air seemed to merge as Mount St. Michel itself loomed in the distance.

An unanticipated delight was a highly convincing performance of *La dernière bande* by Sjef Houppermans. Sjef made ingenious use of the unpromising theatrical space afforded by the chateau's attic, which bore little resemblance to Krapp's den as conceived by Beckett. He was also forced to deal with the challenge of introducing a cassette-player onto the stage when the reel-to-reel tape recorder that he had brought with him from The Netherlands refused to function. In an impromptu tribute during the discussion that followed, Dimitri Soenen praised what he described as a performance that was "at once highly personal and entirely faithful and in which Sjef successfully navigated between the opposing pitfalls of the overly sentimental and the merely mechanical."



Soenen also remarked on the quality of Sjef's representation of the voices of the older and the younger Krapp and his success in creating a visual image that conveyed both the "somber and the humorous" aspects of the play.

In the questionnaires that they were asked to fill out, and which were used as the point of departure for the "séance de clôture," participants were unanimous in praising the high quality of both the organization of the conference and the reception given to them by their hosts at Cerisy. Participants who worried beforehand that a "Décade de Cerisy" would be too long by several days, were surprised to discover, as the end approached, that they would, indeed, have wished it longer. Jürgen Siess, who would shortly return to Cerisy for a second conference, was the envy of us all.

— Thomas J. Cousineau

## The Samuel Beckett Working Group in Maryland

The Samuel Beckett Working Group gathered this June at the annual conference of the International Federation of Theatre Research in College Park, Maryland. The group met for most of the day on Sunday, June 26<sup>th</sup> and then again during the late afternoon of Tuesday, June 28<sup>th</sup> in the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Linda Ben-Zvi directed the meeting; the other participants — Matthijs Engelberts, Everett C. Frost, Anna McMullan, Ellen Mease, Angela Moorjani, Robert Reginio, Antonia Rodríguez-Gago, and Jürgen Siess — were pleased to have Ruby Cohn take part in the discussions of *Krapp's Last Tape*. The Group had decided to focus on this one play, and it was generally agreed that this by no means limited our discussions. Each paper "re-staged" the play in ways that reaffirmed Beckett's unique ability to use an abstract dramatic language to create a complex vision.

Ruby Cohn began the session with a paper entitled "A *Krapp* Chronology," in which she charted her own personal experience with several stagings and re-stagings of the play. In a detailed and moving description of Jean Martin's performance of *Krapp* at the Théâtre Récamier in 1970, she expressed her astonishment at Martin's exceptional skill in contrasting the taped voice of a younger Krapp with what she called "the drooling, driveling relic before me." Cohn also made a connection between Lucky's afflictions in *Waiting for Godot* and Krapp's struggle with his body and his language, which led her to conclude that, while *Godot* occupies a dominant position in the Beckett canon, *Krapp's Last Tape*, even in Martin's superlative performance, veers towards pathos.

The title of Ellen Mease's paper, which followed Cohn's, quoted Beckett on a production of *Krapp*: "We are determined on stillness." For Mease, stillness is at the heart of a play that tells of Krapp's successful struggle to

free himself from his memories. She cogently argued that the play involves "stock-taking and leave-taking." Our subsequent discussion questioned to what extent Krapp is able to take control of his memories or, contrarily, how memory itself possesses him. There was no consensus on this matter; in fact, we agreed that the power of many of the play's images is based on an essential ambiguity. This issue of mastery and possession shadowed our discussions until the end of the session. Responding to Mease's suggestion that the play involves "stock-taking and leave-taking," Angela Moorjani noted that it seems to her that in all of his work Beckett is trying to make birth and death occur at the same time. Mease asked how we can read *Krapp's Last Tape* within an *oeuvre* in which the borders between birth and death are blurred. She returned once more to Krapp's final, silent stillness, which she read as a provocation that asks the audience to question whether we are witnessing an ending or a beginning.

In my own paper entitled "Dramatizing the Archive: *Krapp's Last Tape*," I argued that a "theorization of the archive" might be a fruitful starting point in considering Beckett's relation to the historical crises of the twentieth century, crises which instigated a reevaluation of the connection between history and memory. Krapp speaks into his recorder with a belief that an other, future self could order these disparate memories into a coherent narrative. I argued that in the play Beckett asks how truth can be embodied in the present when "each utterance that is made lends part of itself to a narrative yet to be written." Linda Ben-Zvi noted that this is part of the artistic process itself in Beckett's work, which requires that we rethink what has been structured for us. Antonia Rodríguez-Gago noted that this rethinking, especially of the structure of memory, is inaugurated by Beckett's insistence on the constitutive function of forgetting.

In "Re-Figuring the Stage Body Through the Mechanical Re-Production of Memory" Rodríguez-Gago argued that Krapp's attempt to forestall forgetting and to build a sense of personal continuity through his tapes fails. She stressed the centrality of forgetting in Beckett's aesthetic, a feature manifested in the play by the fact that Krapp is a problematic "receiver" of memory rather than having a body that "contains" memory. Importantly, she noted that "audiences are able to recognize the common features and routines shared by the onstage protagonist and his past taped voices." This underlined her point that "the gaps left by memory are replaced by the inventions of Beckett's characters" and that these characters "use forgetting and misremembering as creative sources." Memory, as objectified through Krapp's tapes, is subject to these discontinuities, and the group agreed that it is in these gaps that Beckett's creative faculty finds its paradoxical source.

In "A Glint of the Old Eye to Come: Ways of Seeing in *Krapp's Last Tape*," Anna McMullan echoed Rodríguez-Gago's presentation by noting that the play asks its audience to reflect on the relationship between the body that Krapp creates through language and the body that we see on stage. The opening mime prevents us from "naturalizing



Participants in this year's meeting of the Samuel Beckett Working Group included: Anna McMullan, Everett Frost, Antonia Rodríguez-Gago, Matthijs Engelberts, Linda Ben-Zvi, Ellen Mease, Jürgen Siess, Robert Reginio, and Anjela Moorjani. Not pictured: Ruby Cohn.

the relationship between identity and the image of the body." McMullan applied this notion of de-naturalized seeing to the way gender operates in the play. Women are frequently associated by Krapp with eyes and with seeing and being seen. Krapp essentially "espouses a highly gendered aesthetic, in which the male voice both separates itself from and appropriates the feminine as a space of integration and re-creation." Krapp is "caught between exclusion of the other in order to define the self, and a longing to see and be seen by the other." This formulation re-staged the ambiguous intersection of birth and death, remembering and forgetting, and stillness and movement that shaped the group's discussion of the play.

Continuing this focus on gender in her own paper, Angela Moorjani analyzed the eye imagery that Krapp associates with the feminine, which she traced back to its medieval, Romantic and post-Romantic sources, in which eyes are figured as objects of both immanence and transcendence. She called attention to Beckett's reference to Goethe's "Ewig-Weibliche" or "the eternal in woman" in his *Krapp* notebooks. She suggested that "behind the cult of the eternal feminine is the need to counter incompleteness by a mystic infinity." She remains unsure, however, how ironically these myths are framed in the play, and the group questioned the status of Beckett's notes in situating the play in relation to its intertexts. With an extremely detailed set of notebook entries relating to several different productions of the play available—productions the group agreed were crucial in Beckett's later revisions of the play—the status of these notes in relation to our interpretations of the play was a question that came up again and again over the course of our session.

Our first day concluded with Everett Frost's prospectus for a radio version of *Krapp's Last Tape*, in which the notes would become part of the spoken text. Frost presented the group with a script in which text from Beckett's notebooks—"precise, eloquent, and concise"—was used to create a narrator's voice. This reinterpretation accords

with the play's frequently noted confrontation with Proustian memory: "Beckett explores the prospect that the new technology of tape has made it possible artificially to precipitate such a powerful and involuntary memory, thereby producing a Proustian moment." The production of this moment, rather than the moment itself recaptured, is something any interpretation of the play needs to account for, Frost argued, because the older Krapp does not listen merely to the younger man's memories. He hears what a prospective radio audience would: "the recreated experience that [his younger self] has in the act of remembering and reporting."

The group met again two days later. In his paper "*Krapp's Last Tape as Clown's Act*," Jürgen Siess noted that Krapp actively tries to fashion a partner by using the machine as a body-substitute and the actualized tape as a voice-substitute. Krapp is essentially engaged in constructing a body, as McMullan and Rodríguez-Gago argued. The modern clown duo—one playing an active, the other a reactive role—is recast in Beckett's play. In his relationship with a machine-partner that "seems to fulfill the function of the speech or the speech organ," Krapp behaves "as if he had before him a completely subservient person. In this way, he resembles a director who authoritatively deprives an actor of his role or, perhaps, a torturer about to cut out the tongue of the victim." The play's use of the comic duo, or the actor and director duo, thus fits within a theatrical corpus that encompasses both *Waiting for Godot* and *Catastrophe*.

The assumption, or loss, of control was touched on in the final paper, Matthijs Engelberts's "*Freud and Krapp's Last Tape: the Banana and the Peel*," which investigated Freudian echoes in the play. Engelberts insisted that his aim was not to formulate a Freudian reading of the play but to decide whether or not Beckett intended the Freudian intertexts to be read ironically. The group agreed that the Freudian *fort-da* game is a key part of Beckett's drama. In this respect, Engelberts argued that in the play "there is an attempt to re-live a past event by manipulating an object of analogous form and comparable function until the past itself becomes malleable." Engelberts asked if this malleability is an accomplishment central to the overcoming of the past that Mease finds in the play or to the inevitable failure to overcome the past that Rodríguez-Gago sees. He also asked if this malleability could be the result of the unending struggle for power that Siess described.

Appropriately, these questions remained unanswered as the group concluded its meeting. Although the meeting of the Working Group that will take place during the celebrations of the Beckett centenary in Dublin will look at the entire gamut of Beckett's works, subsequent Working Group meetings—attended by participants who are as endlessly curious and unendingly open as these participants were—will find an endless amount to discuss in focusing on just one of Beckett's plays.

— Robert Reginio



## Being There

Certain lines come to you just by chance while you're reading or having a conversation or watching a film. You weren't looking for them, yet, once you've heard them, they stay with you. They find their way into you, usually to a place where it hurts. This is how I felt while reading *Fin de partie* for the first time. Now, nearly thirty years later, when I hear old Hamm, alone and anxiety-ridden, driven to speak --to "babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark" -- it seems that these words have never left me, have never stopped digging into me, right there where it hurts.

To each his own Beckett, which is what makes him universal. This is also why any certitude about him is only conjectural. In telling me about Beckett, you do nothing more than tell me who you are, which is already a good deal. Just as one can't read him without running a great risk, one can't direct his plays or act in them without exploring one's interior spaces, from cellar to attic. More than with any other author, you must put your own life on stage; not in order to display it, which is without interest even for those who are most concerned, but in order to "put it into play," which could be of concern to all of us.

For me, the project of producing, initially in their chronological order, three of Beckett's plays (*En attendant Godot*, *Fin de partie*, *La dernière bande*) put into play one of the keys to my own childhood: the tumultuous and complex relationship that I had with an old man, a grandfather. Let's say that he was the sacred and I was the profane or that he was Monsieur Seguin and I was the goat or that my childhood unfolded like a little fairytale, one that was both tender and cruel. And so, reading *Godot* when I was twenty-years old, as also today, I was Estragon, the one who wants to leave, and he was Vladimir, the one who wants to stay and who says to me, "Pull on your trousers." When reading *Fin de partie*, I hear him, like Hamm, saying, "I can't leave you," and, like Clov, I answer, "I know. And you can't follow me." If I did finally leave him, it was so as not to hear him record his last tape.

Since the theater is a collective art form, the risk of his inmost self that Beckett requires of his reader and his director applies as well to his actor. To put into play these biographical fragments, there was David Warrilow and Philippe Demarle, at least that was the idea. But David's illness caught up with us, so, with a sense of painful urgency, we went directly from *Godot* to *La dernière bande*, and Beckett's words passed through us as never before; the dividing line between the theater and life, a line without which the theater would no longer be possible, became only paper thin.

"This is deadly," Hamm says. "Things are livening up," replies Clov. And, indeed, they did "liven up" again, with the Bennets, father and son, whom I visited in Lausanne. I already knew David, the son, to whom I had offered a role in *Le Bourrichon*, which would eventually be played by Philippe Demarle. During our initial meeting, Heinz, the father never left his chair, and David, in the midst of the road-tour of Peter Brook's *L'homme qui*, never sat still. "Every man his speciality," as we are told, and so I offered *Fin de partie* to them. An intuition—and it was nothing more than an intuition—that with these two actors the game would be close and that the dividing line between life and theater would be extremely fragile—as well as the "existential trembling" that this produced—seemed to me to lead directly to Beckett's play. Beckett confined Nagg and Nell, Hamm's progenitors, to dustbins, an idea as powerful as it is cruel, but whose theatrical staging always involves a form of artifice.

The choice of Jean-Claude Grenier and Mireille Mosse to interpret these roles corresponded to the same considerations that led me to cast Heinz and David as Hamm and Clov. They were excellent actors and had been good friends ever since G enevi eve de Kermabon brought them together in her stage version of Tod Browning's *Freaks*. Grenier, who died in 1999, had "brittle-bone disease" and Moss e is a midget; both of them could, in the dustbins conceived by Beckett, put their lives into play on stage. One had only to listen during rehearsals to Jean-Claude Grenier comparing his dustbin to his childhood cradle to understand this.

We surely knew that this adventure was a precarious one, which is why, from the very beginning, we put our cards, as the saying goes, on the table. Each of us could leave the game at any time; none of us was under any obligation regarding the final result. It was doubtlessly this freedom—made possible, in particular, by the Th eatre de Vidy—which allowed us initially to present our work to the public. And when I watch *Fin de partie* today I relive the happiness of our rehearsals and the pleasure of working on an eight-square-meter stage. I hear the laugh of the father and his son, their questionings and their fears, but I also see once again the Monsieur Seguin of my childhood. I hear him say to me, "Outside of here it's death," and I reply, "I'll leave you." And when Heinz-Hamm says to David-Clov, "If I could drag myself down to the sea! I'd make a pillow of sand for my head and the tide would come," at that moment it's David Warrilow lying in his hospital bed that I hear. But I also hear Beckett saying to each and everyone of us, "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on." And this is why, when I watch *Fin de partie* today, I realize that it's all theater, but that it's also so much more than theater.

— Jo el Jouanneau

Translated by Thomas Cousineau

## The Shape that Matters

In *Waiting for Godot* Vladimir reflects, "One of the thieves was saved. (Pause.) It's a reasonable percentage." Somewhat later, talking about the meaning of some Biblical references in his play, Beckett told Harold Hobson, "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned. That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters'" (qtd. in Acheson 5). From then on, critics have quoted Augustine via Beckett, or, rather, they have misquoted Augustine via Beckett. James Knowlson, for example, in talking about the sources of *Waiting for Godot*, says, "A phrase of St Augustine, 'Do not despair, one of the thieves was saved; do not presume, one of the thieves was damned,' inspired the concern with the fifty-fifty chance of salvation that runs through the play" (379). A search through the *Patrologia Latina* reveals, however, that the Latin Father did not write that epigrammatic phrase. I have searched the complete works of St Augustine and found several passages where the expressions "nolite praesumere," "nolite superbire," and "nolite desperare" appear, but they never occur in the same paragraph or in a context similar to the one Beckett had quoted.

The underlying idea of the quotation, to be sure, resembles his thought, as his commentary on the *Psalms* shows:

Dominus erat in medio crucifixus; iuxta illum duo latrones erant: unus insultavit, alter credidit; unus damnatus est, alter iustificatus est; unus habuit poenam suam et hic et in futurum, alteri autem dixit Dominus: Amen dico tibi, hodie mecum eris in paradiso. (Enarratio v.21)

If Augustine was not the author of the phrase, who was? Had Beckett made it up or was he quoting someone else? The latter seems to be more likely. In 1592 Robert Greene wrote, "To this doth that golden sentence of St. Augustine allude which he speaketh of the thief hanging on the cross: There was (saith he) one thief saved and no more, therefore presume not, and there was one saved, and therefore despair not." Robert Greene also attributed this quotation to Augustine, but whether he misread the Father or was wrongly quoting someone else remains in question. It is evident, however, that this is the source of Beckett's phrase. Greene's quotation has the same "shape" as Beckett's.

Interestingly, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, J.C. Ryle, in his *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, remarks, "There is one case of death-bed repentance recorded, that of the penitent thief, that none should despair; and only one,

that none should presume." Here, the phrase emerges again but somewhat differently. The apparent symmetry of the proposition is twisted. Whereas the versions of Robert Greene and of Beckett maintain what Knowlson calls the "fifty-fifty chance of salvation," Ryle plays with the apparent symmetry to expose an evident asymmetry. There is no mention here of the damned thief; it is unnecessary. One thief was saved; that might be encouraging, but we shall never forget it was only one.

If Beckett had said he was not certain whether the phrase belonged to Augustine, critics would have searched for it before blindly quoting him. However, not only did he assert that Augustine had written it, but he also commented on the original in Latin, which, of course, he could never have read. Whether this was an inadvertence or a deliberately misleading remark by Beckett, we cannot be certain. It is unlikely, however, that he had used only Augustine as a source. He may have read Robert Greene—who said that the phrase was Augustine's—and become interested in the shape of the phrase, in its symmetry. After that, it may have been an honest mistake which was perpetuated by everyone who, trusting Beckett's recollection, attributed the phrase to Augustine.

— Maria Cristina Figueredo

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# Current & Upcoming Events

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## Beckett Panel at the Washington, DC, MLA

"Beckett and History" Friday, December 30, 1:45 – 3:00 PM Delaware Suite B, Marriott

*Presiding:* Enoch Brater, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

1. "The Bowler Hat in Beckett: A Political Reading," Sean D.C. Kennedy, Saint Mary's University, Nova Scotia
2. "Forget about History in Beckett: 'Schicksal=Zufall for all human purposes,'" James McNaughton, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
3. "'... Humanity in Ruins': The Historical Body in Samuel Beckett's Fiction," Katherine Weiss, University of Texas Pan American

## Aix-en-Provence, 14-16 June 2006: *Samuel Beckett and the Four Natural Elements*

The four natural elements of earth, air, fire, and water play an important role in Beckett's work. Earth - now mother, now grave - and its various forms is pervasive: the sand in which Winnie is buried, the mud where many protagonists crawl in *How It Is*, or the stones that invade the earth in *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Air appears frequently, either in a physical sense, as in the echo chamber in which dead voices resound and as the medium that allows a bird or a glider to soar in *Afar a Bird* and *That Time*, or in a metaphysical way, as when the protagonists, at dawn or dusk, examine the sky to discern where the "personal God quaquaquaqu" is hidden. As for fire, it can be the heat that burns and dries the "bodies" in *The Lost Ones* or the enthusiasm with which Krapp once burned; yet, more often than not, only embers remain, as in *Lessness* and *Embers*. Finally, although "it's never the same pus from one second to the next," the water of memories is

recurrent in Beckett's work, making the images of the past resurface and float, as in the case of Nell or the old man in *That Time*.

Questioning the role of the four elements in Beckett's *oeuvre*, which has always tended towards the fundamental, is a way of paying tribute to him during the centenary of his birth. The study of these essential elements illustrates Beckett's phrase "less is more" and its opposite, "more is less," since their small number allows many approaches: earth, air, fire and water can be considered from a thematic, geographical, physical, or metaphysical point of view. We could also consider the ways in which, seen from a stylistic or a linguistic angle, the natural elements give form to Samuel Beckett's writing. For further information about this conference, please contact Karine Germoni at [kgermoni1@9online.fr](mailto:kgermoni1@9online.fr).

## Beckett Centenary Symposium at Trinity College Dublin

In April 2006, Ireland will be celebrating the centenary of Samuel Beckett's birth. In partnership with the Gate Theatre, Dublin, Trinity College will host a Symposium entitled: *The Beckett Legacy: A Centenary Celebration*, from April 5th - 9th 2006. This will comprise talks and panels featuring invited artists and scholars and a meeting of the International Samuel Beckett working group directed by Professor Linda Ben Zvi. Confirmed speakers and panelists include H. Porter Abbott, Linda Ben Zvi, Mary Bryden, Ruby Cohn, Steven Connor, Anthony Cronin, Terry Eagleton, Stan Gontarski, Richard Kearney, Jim Knowlson, Paul Muldoon, Frank McGuinness, and Jean-Michel Rabaté.

The working group will meet in the morning, panels in the afternoon and writer's interviews or talks early eve-

ning. The Gate Theatre will also be mounting a Festival in partnership with the Barbican, London. In Dublin, there will be nine Beckett plays presented at the Gate (*Endgame*, as well as programme of poetry and prose readings, will be playing during the week of the Symposium), the Beckett Films will be shown at the Irish Film Institute, and there will be visual arts exhibitions in the Douglas Hyde, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, and the Royal Hibernian Academy. There will be a TCD Library exhibition on Beckett and Trinity. Radio Telefis Eireann is commissioning new productions of the radio and television plays. For further information on the Trinity Symposium contact Anna McMullan on [amcmulln@tcd](mailto:amcmulln@tcd) or Anna Kamaralli at [kamarala@tcd.ie](mailto:kamarala@tcd.ie).

# Current & Upcoming Events

## Beckett's Proust/Deleuze's Proust

The School of European Studies at Cardiff University invites paper submissions for a two-day international conference to take place at Cardiff University on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March 2006. Current sponsors include the British Academy and the Society for French Studies.

This conference will stage an interdisciplinary encounter between three influential French writers: the novelist Marcel Proust, the playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett, and the philosopher and cultural critic Gilles Deleuze. Although individually the subject of sustained critical attention, the three writers are innovatively drawn together here in an event designed to draw out their complementary insights and their aesthetic, literary, and philosophical affinities. These affinities are many and complex. Both Beckett and Deleuze wrote monographs on Proust. Visual and sonic phenomena are crucial in the writing of Proust and Beckett, while their fusion in the televisual and cinematic was a preoccupation of Deleuze, who not only wrote a study of Beckett's television plays, but also included analysis of Beckett's only work for cinema, *Film*, in his two-volume study of cinema. The writing of Proust and Beckett has, in turn, inspired musical composition, and a performance of a selection of this music is planned as a special conference event.

This is a particularly timely moment to stage such a conference. 2006 marks the centenary of Beckett's birth, and prompts a widespread evaluation of his cross-generic *oeuvre*, while Deleuzian scholarly debate continues unabated since his death in 1995. There has also been a marked resurgence of interest in Proust in recent years, as evidenced by the philosophers, novelists, and film-makers who have reinterpreted his work. The conference will be of interest both to the corpus of scholars attached to each of these three writers and to those engaged, more specifically, in questions of intertextual, interaesthetic, and interdisciplinary exchange. In addition to keynote addresses, there will be two concurrent panels on each day of the conference. These intersecting perceptions will be drawn out in a concluding round table, but will also be more widely disseminated in an edited collection of essays based upon the conference papers.

Guidelines: submission deadline is 31 December 2005. Papers (to last approximately twenty minutes) are invited which relate Proust's work to that of Beckett AND/OR Deleuze. The field of engagement is broad. Areas to be considered might include

- Philosophical, literary, and/or aesthetic affinities
- Beckett's and/or Deleuze's evaluations of Proust
- Proustian influences on Beckett and/or Deleuze
- The interaesthetic: visual, sonic, cinematic, e.g.:

- How have painters, musicians, or film-makers interpreted their work?
- Problems of adaptation: comparisons and contrasts
- Music/the visual arts, painters/musicians in their works
- The musical or visual textures of their work
- Cinematic features in their work
- Proust as (Beckettian) dramatist?
- Proust as (Deleuzian) philosopher or cultural critic?
- To what extent is Beckett's Proust Deleuze's Proust?
- What might Proust have made of Beckett and/or Deleuze?

We would also welcome proposals for other creative contributions. These might include:

- A conversation between Proust, Deleuze, and Beckett
- *A la recherche* by Beckett
- *A la recherche* by Deleuze

Some small postgraduate bursaries will be available for those postgraduates unable to obtain funding from their own institutions. Please send abstracts of 250-300 words, with brief biodata, preferably in Word format, by email to either of the organisers: Mary Bryden [BrydenKM@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:BrydenKM@cardiff.ac.uk), or Margaret Topping [ToppingM@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ToppingM@cardiff.ac.uk), or by mail to:

Professor Mary Bryden  
School of European Studies  
Cardiff University  
65-68 Park Place  
CARDIFF  
CF10 3AS  
United Kingdom.

Tel: (+44) (0)29 2087 4889

Fax: (+44) (0)29 2087 4946

## The Beckett Working Group at TCD

The organizers of the Beckett centenary at Trinity College, Dublin, in partnership with the Gate Theatre, have invited the Samuel Beckett Working Group to participate in the events scheduled 5-9 April 2006, under the title "The Beckett Legacy." Now in its tenth year as part of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR/FIRT), the Beckett Working Group has developed a format

to provide the greatest possible interaction among participants. Papers are kept short, not exceeding 15 pages. They may be works in progress or summary versions of longer studies. All papers are distributed in sufficient time to allow members to read them prior to the meeting. At the sessions, approximately 10-15 minutes is allotted to each presenter to summarize or comment on the paper and 25-30 minutes for group discussion of the essay, depending on the number of participants. For the Working Group sessions in Dublin, the organizers have selected the general title "Samuel Beckett at 100: Looking Back/Looking Forward." Like the overall title of the celebration, it is sufficiently broad to allow for a wide variety of topics and approaches. Selected essays will be published in a book dedicated to Ruby Cohn, who has participated in the Working Group since its inception. The group will meet mornings, 5-9 April. Afternoon and evening events of the centenary celebration will include plenary sessions, lectures, informal talks, and performances. Those participating in any other event are invited to be part of the Working Group as well. Registration for the complete program will be handled through Trinity College, which will also assist participants with hotel accommodations. Individuals will be responsible for registration fees and payment for travel, hotels, and related expenses. The Beckett Working Group is open to all; no prior participation is necessary. For further information, please contact Linda Ben-Zvi at [Linda.Benzvi@bfge.org](mailto:Linda.Benzvi@bfge.org).

## Atlanta Centenary Celebration

The Atlanta theatre community is planning a year-long celebration of Samuel Beckett's centenary. Organizers have developed a logo that has already been adopted by Hamburg and Tallahassee and that will be offered, with their own names added, to all other cities that are sponsoring events. They plan to ring the logo with the names of all the other cities, so that people participating in one event will see there are others going on. They also have a website, which will have links to the other cities' projects. They would like to post on this site a downloadable list of the institutions in each city that is hosting events and to encourage the home-city to translate as needed so that relevant details can be included in programs for their local events. The website, still in beginning stages, may be found at: [yearofbeckett.com](http://yearofbeckett.com)

A study guide for the plays that are to be presented in Atlanta, will be added to the website in two stages

(spring 2006 and fall 2006); it is being developed by Emory alumna, Christine Shives, with the advice of a group of high-school teachers. We hope it will be useful to young audiences as well as of interest to book-clubs that may want to read a little Beckett.

Walter Asmus will be directing in fall 2006. Organizers hope that other guest directors and companies will also be funded. A unique feature of the Atlanta project is that there already have been weekly Beckett workshops at Pushpush Theater in Decatur (an Atlanta suburb). This has included readings, films, talks and acting-workshops, open to any and to all. These have been consistently interesting and well attended. The productions being developed now in Atlanta can be invited elsewhere; contact information is given on the website.



## Additional Events

Two River Theater Company--Jonathan Fox, Artistic Director-- will present a centennial Beckett festival from March 16 to April 2 in Red Bank, New Jersey. The festival will include, in addition to *Waiting for Godot* and *Words and Music*, two alternating programs of the short plays, "Film," and keynote talks as well as several symposia. For details: [www.trtc.org](http://www.trtc.org) or 732-345-1400, or write to Lois Oppenheim at [oppenheimL@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:oppenheimL@mail.montclair.edu).

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The National Gallery of Ireland will host a round-table, to be moderated by Lois Oppenheim, on the theme of Beckett and the visual arts. This will take place at the museum in Dublin during the week of April 3rd, 2006. For updated information on precise date and time, see [www.national-gallery.ie](http://www.national-gallery.ie) or e-mail [oppenheimL@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:oppenheimL@mail.montclair.edu).

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Grove Atlantic, Inc., will celebrate 2006 with the publication of a four-volume edition of Beckett's work entitled *Samuel Beckett: The Centenary Edition*. The series editor for this project is the American writer Paul Auster. Individual volumes and their editors are as follows: Volume 1 (*Murphy, Watt, Mercier and Camier*) by Colm Tóibín; Volume 2 (*Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, How It Is*) by Salman Rushdie; Volume 3 (the complete dramatic works) by Edward Albee; Volume 4 (poetry, short fiction, and selected criticism) by J. M. Coetzee. The publication date is April 2006.

# BOOK REVIEWS

Lois Oppenheim, *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. xii+262pp. \$22.95; £16.99.

Synthesis and selection always distort that which they purport to summarise and clarify. The overview and evaluation of Beckett studies in this collection of essays inevitably reduces the big, blooming, buzzing confusion of Beckett criticism to artificially discrete and linear strains. Yet, as *Watt* unforgettably demonstrates, a refusal of selection or value judgements holds its own perils for representing or understanding the world. The rapid expansion of Beckett criticism since the sixties, and the way in which various theoretical schools from structuralism to post-colonialism have mined his work, can be overwhelming, especially to non-specialists. This book is not simply a bibliography, nor even an annotated or critical bibliography, but a series of thirteen essays by leading Beckettians on the various approaches that critical commentary on Beckett has adopted. But

it is more ambitious than an objective overview: most of the essays pull no punches in evaluating the various monographs and essays they discuss and several

proclaim new critical directions for Beckett studies. At their best these essays manage to combine cartography of a critical field with a demonstration of what it is in Beckett that provokes or supports it. Shifting between his critics and Beckett's own work, they offer, then, both an analysis of a critical approach and an example of it.

The essay topics are as arresting as they are various. Rather than the predictable checklist of theoretical movements or schools that have championed Beckett, a thematic approach is deployed that, while covering relevant schools, allows the author of an essay space for additional ideas and insights. H. Porter Abbott's excellent opening essay on "Narrative" draws both on narratology and reception theory. He reflects on the multiple ways in which stories and their inevitable exclusions work in Beckett, invoking the concept of "egregious gaps" to indicate the indeterminacy that readers and spectators encounter. If Abbott is interested in strategic absences, Enoch Brater's essay on "Intertextuality" reflects on haunting presences, the explicit and submerged effect of literary allusion in Beckett's work. A writer as recondite as Beckett (especially in his pre-War period) will always attract annotation, but Brater's essay traces not just the overt references but also the less obvious, but no less formative, watermark underneath. In its stimulating analysis of Yeats's presence

in Beckett's later drama, Brater suggestively argues that "Yeats shadows Beckett yet Beckett too inevitably shadows Yeats."

Of course there are omissions here and alternative categories that one might suggest. More overt treatments of political aspects to Beckett's work or a chapter on the recent turn in Beckett studies to a consideration of his relationship to other arts, especially music and painting, might have been included. The final chapter by David Pattie, on "Beckett and Bibliography," goes some way to correcting these omissions by providing a chronological run-through of the history of Beckett criticism. The political implications of Beckett's work have, in English language criticism at any rate, tended to be picked up rather obliquely in post-structuralist and feminist approaches, such as those covered here in essays by Leslie Hill and Elin Diamond. The post-structuralist notion that Beckett's work dismantles normative modes of thinking or straitened forms of identity has crept into many

critical approaches such as feminism and post-colonialism (the latter covered in an essay by Anna McMullan, entitled "Irish/Postcolonial Beckett"). There is, typically, a politically-inspired approval of these

subversive, and by implication emancipatory, modes of expression and imagination. Peter Boxall's provocative essay on "Beckett and Homoeroticism" exemplifies this tendency, arguing convincingly that the homoerotic dimension to Beckett's work has been critically overlooked because of an unconscious heteronormative bias amongst critics.

Assessment of Beckett's fraught relationship with religion can easily slide into reductive treatment in either direction, a danger well-avoided in Mary Bryden's informed and judicious handling of the issue. So much about Beckett's work and biography beckons a psycho-analytical reading that this too can be an over-populated field. It is scrupulously mapped here by Angela Moorjani with due attention to Beckett's own influences and contexts. S. E. Gontarski's learned essay, "Beckett and Performance," argues for the performative qualities of Beckett's work as a whole and advocates an approach to the drama more alert to performance history than hitherto. Gontarski points to Beckett's own work as director, while Katherine Worth's essay, "Sources of Attraction to Beckett's Theater," looks at the various sources of appeal of Beckett's plays, with reference to numerous productions, including an extended consideration of the 2001 "Beckett on Film" project.

"This collection stands as an indispensable assessment of, and intervention in, the current state of Beckett studies in the run up to his centenary."

Many of the articles in the collection make reference to notebooks, manuscripts, drafts, and letters, demonstrating that archival studies of Beckett have never gone away, even in the headiest days of post-structuralist theory. This sort of scholarly research gives ballast to the more interpretative and theoretical work that has appeared alongside it. These studies, and the contextual interests that support them, imbue the study of Beckett with scholarly rigour and set a standard of excellence for the empirical mapping of Beckett's work. Indeed, since the theory wars that animated English studies a generation ago have now stilled somewhat or the reverberations have now been absorbed into general practice, there has been something of a surge in archival or empirical Beckett studies in recent years. The title of Linda Ben Zvi's article, "Biographical, Textual, and Historical Origins," might suggest a survey of archival criticism but the article itself gives instead a scintillating consideration of the body in Beckett's work, before proceeding to an extended consideration of Samuel Johnson's influence. It is a valuable article in its own right, but there may have been room in the collection for an evaluative essay on biographical or archival criticism as whole. It would have been interesting to see some sustained reflections on how facts, scholarship, and research might inform or be informed by interpretation, criticism and theory. It is a relationship which, after all, has not been unwaveringly harmonious, in Beckett studies or elsewhere. Another caveat would be some shoddy copy-editing in several of the essays.

It is always easy to point at omissions, perhaps too easy. This collection stands as an indispensable assessment of, and intervention in, the current state of Beckett studies in the run up to his centenary.

— Ronan McDonald

Ciaran Ross, *Aux frontières du vide. Beckett: une écriture sans mémoire ni désir*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2004. 310 pp. \$78; 62€.

This book's measured title, suffused with modificatory terms, suggests the orientation of its enquiry. Memory and desire are evoked by their absence; void is apprehensible only in its borderlands. Focusing on the intense compositional period embracing the Trilogy and *Godot* – a period exhibiting what is deemed (almost oxymoronically) to be a "vide salutaire" (11) – Ciaran Ross re-examines the notion of negativity in Beckett, asking whether there can be absence without a conjuration of *what* is absent, or of *when* this absence found its origins. At different moments in its unfurling, the exposition proceeds, in time-honoured *via negativa* tradition, in terms of what it is not. Hence, it is not an analysis which would seek in language alone the

route-paths of affectivity; neither is it one which would seek to situate an exploration of negativity within defined theological or psychoanalytical parameters. Similarly, though pacing adroitly through terrain marked out by Bion, Lacan, Anzieu, Winnicott and Klein, Ross shows himself to be beholden to none. Distancing himself from the application of any kind of Freudian determinism, he aims to show how Beckett's postwar creatures, far from seeking to repair a primal severance, are engaged in an unpicking of their own intersubjective status and a gravitation towards failure: "Si désir il y a chez Molloy, c'est celui de la négation" (55). Making good use of Klein's notions of object relations, Ross nevertheless resists the reduction of Beckett's writing to the status of a "réceptacle kleinien, de bons et de mauvais objets voués à une dialectique sans fin" (59).

So is Beckett, then, a Bionic Man? Certainly Wilfred Bion supplies useful tools for modelling an abstractive process which Ross discerns in the Trilogy, and which is characterised by a passage from "primitive", violent thought towards the more exploratory thought discernible in *Godot*. For me, the most persuasive aspect of this study is its analysis of Winnicott's adherence to the transitional space, the playful intermediary area where the *process* of linkage (rather than the pivots of linked terms) provides the possibility of transaction between psychic reality and external reality. This is the borderland inhabited by the Beckettian trudge, which Ross discusses to profitable effect in relation to *Godot*. In this landscape, void is not pathological but, rather, protective. It is this emptiness – a positive negativity, purged of memory and desire – which will point the way forward for the Beckettian organism.

In tracing the originating contours of "le vide beckettien," Ross explores the complex figure of the mother, linking it with tensions around ingestion, and forcible rather than sustaining feeding. Moving to a consideration of interpersonal (non-) relations, the problem of posited but unfulfilled genealogies is examined, in terms of both fatherhood and motherhood, as a drama of kinship, with *Molloy* providing the notable case study. Taking up the suggestion, made early in the analysis, that the network of oppositions between Beckett and Joyce might lead one to conclude that "l'oeuvre beckettienne n'existait qu'en version négative de Joyce" (40), Ross associates the relationship between Joyce and Beckett with that between the Morans, father and son, arguing that Beckett imbues with perturbation the entire structure of fatherhood, whether biological or symbolic.

In the third section of the study, Ross turns to the threatened aporia which the embrace of nothingness might produce. How may absence be rendered without reference to space, especially in the theatre? For Ross, the

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theatrical void is a dynamic space in which distinctions between internal and external space, between past and future, between here and elsewhere, are dissolved, enabling the inhabitants to retain their status as radical outsiders. Hence, *En attendant Godot* may simultaneously incarnate repetition and amnesia, since all that can be mirrored is a faulty image of what has passed or is passing. It is in the theatre, then, that Beckett discovers his alternative space, which is not a vacuum but is “un vide [...] fabriqué, joué, pensé, travaillé” (186). Here it is that Didi and Gogo, while waiting for a Godot who both is and is not, may (re)create in an alternation of ludic and purposive activity, playing with being absent, toying with being present.

The final part of the study considers how Beckett’s language provides impetus for this hard-working, thought-invested void. Through stances of “méfiance perpétuelle” (221), interrogation, and availability for digression spaces between and beyond the narration are constantly opened up. In the theatre, “thinking aloud” between couples generates a repertoire which, rather than banishing negativity, draws attention to it, while Lucky’s “think” leads to his collapse. After him, Worm, created in thought by the narrative process, will pursue a similar think “pour rien,” enabling both a rehearsal of origins and a distancing from them.

It is difficult to do justice to the nuances of this study in a short review. Ross presents his project not as an anatomisation of Beckettian negativity, but as an avenue of exploration. It is a reflective and highly committed

engagement with this crucial period in Beckett’s development as a writer. It deserves – and I hope it will receive – equally committed and careful readers.

– Mary Bryden

Anthony Uhlmann, Sjef Houppermans & Bruno Clément, eds., *After Beckett/D’après Beckett*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2004. 624pp. \$155; 124 euros.

*After Beckett/D’après Beckett* gathers together papers delivered at the 2003 Beckett Symposium at the University of Sydney. This symposium marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first performance of *Godot*; in this regard, it not only celebrates a landmark in contemporary performance, but also provides a chance for those scholars involved in Beckett studies to take stock both of Beckett’s achievements and of the academic activity that has surrounded his work from the early days through to the present. We are in the middle of significant anniversaries: *Godot*’s half-century, and, next year, the centenary of Beckett’s birth. Moreover, we are passing through an interesting theoretical moment. The loosely connected skein of ideas generally grouped under the term post-modernism no longer has the same kind of intellectual force as it had, even five years ago; given Beckett’s status as a theoretical bell-weather (and as an author whose work has attracted its own specialised discourse) a collection of essays that seeks to map out, as the introduction puts it, what it means to write after Beckett stands a good chance of indicating something wider – something about the state of theory, at a time when the status of theory is itself under question.

As the editors note, any collection drawn from conference proceedings will tend to create a narrative from the contributions that the conference itself might not necessarily have; however, having said that, the terms under which the essays are collected are themselves wide enough to include a great variety of approaches to the subject. Indeed (and this is a feature of other collections of this type), the variety of approaches is itself one of the key features of Beckett studies: his writing has become a form of textual flypaper – it sometimes seems as though all approaches to the study of literature have at some point managed to attach themselves to the work. The three general areas of analysis (“Intertextuality and Confluence,” “Philosophy and Theory,” and “Textual Genesis, Contextual Genesis and Language”) covered here are so general as to be almost shapeless. Peter Williams’ essay, “Unsayings and the Categories of Discourse in Beckett’s Gestural Texts,” is placed in the last category, but it could fit into any one of the three without too much difficulty; and it is not the only essay in the collection whose position

## New & Forthcoming

- Beckett, Samuel et al. *Beckett Remembering, Remembering Beckett: A Centenary Celebration*. New York: Arcade Publishing, Inc., 2006. ISBN 1-55970-772-0. \$26.00.
- Buning, Marius et al. *Historicising Beckett/Issues of performance: Beckett dans l’histoire/en jouant Beckett*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. ISBN 90-420-1767-8. \$100.
- Slade, Andrew. *Lyotard, Beckett, Duras, and the Postmodern Sublime*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006. ISBN 0-8204-7862-8. Price N/A.



could be shifted. This is, however, not the editors' fault. It is a necessary part of any general conference on Beckett; the papers will themselves thread together across any boundaries set by the organizers, and if the conference manages to incarnate a theme (or a number of themes) it will only do so in retrospect.

So, having said that, what are the themes that emerge from the collection? Firstly, there is the sense, not that theorists and concepts associated with post-modernity have either superseded previous formations, or have themselves been superseded, but that the discourses associated with post-modernity and discourses associated with modernity

now co-exist side by side in Beckett studies. There are essays that would fit neatly into a collection on post-modern Beckett

(Russell Smith's "Beckett's Endlessness: Rewriting Modernity and the Postmodern Sublime," for example). There is, however, also a run of essays (from James Phillips, Matthew Holt, and Chris Conti) re-evaluating Adorno's seminal essay on *Endgame*. These essays take their place beside others which draw our attention backward – to Leibniz (Naoya Mori's interesting essay "Beckett's Windows and the Windowless Self"), and to Descartes and Geulincx. Indeed, Anthony Uhlmann's essay "A Fragment of a Vitagraph: Hiding and Revealing in Beckett, Geulincx and Descartes" is, as he points out, one which deals with Geulincx in some depth; in the history of Beckett criticism, Geulincx has been frequently invoked but rarely studied. In addition, there are explorations of the phenomenological aspects of Beckett's work by Garin Dowd and Peter Williams. Williams' essay uses Beckett's work to argue for a post-hermeneutics; the value of Beckett's later work in particular resides, for Williams, in its inaccessibility to hermeneutical analysis. To this admixture is added Blanchot (Suzie Gibson's "The Work, the Neutral and *The Unnamable*"), Bakhtin (David Musgrave's "The Abstract Grotesque in Beckett's *Trilogy*"), Deleuze, Badiou and Anzieu (Bruno Clement's useful "Ce que les philosophes avec Samuel Beckett") and Beckett's own analyst, Bion (Angela Moorjani's "Peau de chagrin: Beckett and Bion on Looking Not To See"). Interestingly, this is a mirror of the current state of theory in the academy: theoretical approaches have collapsed into each other, and (perhaps only for a little while) any sense of a theoretical progression – of one broad movement succeeding another – has been lost.

Paradoxically, though, this is a continuing source of strength. One of the generating features of Beckett's

work – at least as far as the academy is concerned – is its multiplicity. It is hard to think of a theoretical approach that does not meet with Beckett at some point; in fact, as some of these essays (Bruno Cléments', in particular) make clear, Beckett has himself entered the theoretical canon, as a goad and exemplar for Deleuze, Blanchot and Badiou. His work, though, would not have proved so fruitful if it were simply a useful example that could be used to demonstrate a particular philosophical approach. Beckett, in fact, interrogates: it is possible for Naoya Mori, for example, to talk of Beckett's refutation of Leibniz

without the phrase sounding inappropriate, as though one type of writing is illegitimately superimposed upon another. The phrase seems right: Beckett is, at the heart of his work, engaged in an argument – with structures of thought, structures of feeling, structures

of language which shades into philosophy as easily, and as readily as it does into arguments over the place and purpose of art.

It is a problem within Beckett studies that Beckett is frequently treated as though he were an *echt* philosopher, whose work simply happens to be couched in art; some of the essays here – Ranjan Ghosh's "Reconfiguring the Waiting for Godot: Explorations within some paradigms of Hindu philosophy," for example – links texts and thought systems rather too programmatically. More successful are the run of essays – by James Phillips, Matthew Holt, and Chris Conti – that read Adorno and Beckett through the prism of Adorno's own writing on Beckett; these essays are able to create a usefully dialectical relation between the writers. It is here that Beckett's work and the tradition of Western philosophy can usefully intersect: as related species of writing, circling around a central theme – the painful relation of the self to the world.

As with philosophy, so with literature. It is hard to find artists who have followed along the path that Beckett has cut (indeed, it would be hard to imagine what such work might look like). Instead, the relation is the same as that between Beckett and the philosophers outlined above. Certain papers here outline the conversation between Beckett's work and the writings of Claude Simon (Anthony Macris' "Samuel Beckett, Claude Simon and the *Mise en Abyme* of Paradoxical Duplication"), Fredericke Mayrocker (Hannes Schweiger's simply titled "Samuel Beckett and Fredericke Mayrocker") and Kobo Abe (Michael Guest's very interesting "Autonomy and the Body in Samuel Beckett and Kobo Abe"). Beckett's own relation to contemporaries and predecessors is covered in Minako

"The coherence, strangely, comes from the diversity of approaches, and the sheer multiplicity of the linkages between Beckett and Western culture."

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Okamuro's "Alchemical Dances in Beckett and Yeats," Masaki Kondo's "*Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Igitur*" (which explores the relation between the late Beckett text and Mallarmé's poem), and Anthony Cordingley's interesting "Keeping Their Distance: Beckett and Borges Writing after Joyce."

There are fewer examples of the relation between Beckett's writing and other art forms (one might have expected more of this, after Mary Bryden's and Lois Oppenheim's work). However, one of the best essays in the collection – Mary Bryden's "Beckett and the Dynamic Still" – explores the relation between movement in Beckett, and the interpretation of that movement; to do this, Bryden sets up an interesting tripartite dialogue between Beckett, the artist Maggie Hambling, and the actor/comedian/performer Max Wall. Beckett's own dialogue with art is covered in various essays (Sean Kennedy's "The Artist Who Stakes His Being is from Nowhere: Beckett and McGreevy on the Art of Jack B. Yeats," David A. Hatch's "The Untidy Analyst: Dialogue Form, Elenchus, and Subversion in 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit,'" and Takeshi Kawashima's "Conjunction of the Essential and the Incidental: Fragmentation and Juxtaposition: or Samuel Beckett's Critical Writings of the 1930s").

Given this, there are some notable omissions: only one essay deals with recent developments in the staging of Beckett's work (Yann Mével's "Après ou d'après Beckett: Joel Jouanneau metteur en scène de Beckett") and none on the actor in Beckett (with the partial exception of Bryden's essay, discussed above). This is a curious feature of the collection: the dialogue between Beckett and various actors is the longest sustained artistic dialogue in Beckett's life; arguably, it has yet to receive its due in the academic analysis of his work.

The collection as a whole, therefore, establishes a thematic coherence which, to an extent, cuts across the divisions that the editors have decided upon. The coherence, strangely, comes from the diversity of approaches, and the sheer multiplicity of the linkages between Beckett and Western culture. This dialogue is one in which Beckett is both antagonist and co-conspirator; he is both an exemplar of the development of Western culture and an artist who, in his art, conspires in its hoped-for destruction. This dialogue is endlessly generative; but, to borrow a term from David Hatch's essay, it is untidy. It does not resolve itself into one shape (not even, *pace* David Hesla, the shape of chaos); and, as several essays here remind us (William Martin's "*Esse and Percepi in Film: a 'Note' upon the Beckett-Schneider 'Correspondence,'*" Nadia Louar's "*Le Bilinguisme dans l'oeuvre de Samuel Beckett,*" Gerry Dukes' "*Englishing Godot*") this dialogue is inscribed in the creation of the work. In this regard, the most interesting essay is Dirk Van Hulle's "(Hiatus in MS.): *Watt* and

the Textual Genesis of *Stirrings Still*." The later work, as Van Hulle demonstrates from a careful analysis of the manuscripts, grows from a discarded reference back to the earlier work. It is a staple of Beckett criticism that his work grows in the gaps and silences indicated by the words themselves: the great virtue of Van Hulle's essay is that it carefully documents this process as it happens.

So, this collection establishes an untidy conversation between Beckett, the culture that creates him, and the culture that he has helped create. With a collection this size there are bound to be some misfirings (Sabbar Saadoun Sultan's "The Critical Aspects of Beckett's *Trilogy*" is rather old-hat, rehearsing as it does arguments that have been made better elsewhere: and Livio Dobrez's "The Word in Crisis: Variations on a Theme by Samuel Beckett" is only tangentially about Beckett; it also runs yet another variation on that tired theme, that everything is always getting worse).

At its best, though (and I would single out Garin Dowd's, Mary Bryden's, Anthony Uhlmann's and Dirk Van Hulle's essays as being particularly strong) the collection does give a sense of that conversation, of the scope of Beckett studies, and also a sense of its porousness: that sense that Beckett's work intersects with, and participates in, the development of wider arguments over the nature and scope of representation. Several essays here evoke Derrida's conception of the tympanum and the sense in which it echoes Beckett's own use of the term (which occurs memorably in *The Unnamable*). See, for example, Paul Stewart, " 'All men talk, when talk they must, the same tripe': Beckett, Derrida, and Needle Wylie," and Amir Ali Nojournian's "Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*: The Story of that Impossible Place Named Silence"). This collection posits Beckett's work as a whole as a tympanum – as a boundary space between dialogues, and as therefore an integral part of these dialogues; indeed, as the proper site on which such arguments can most profitably be conducted.

– David Pattie

## Correction

There was an error in the price quoted in our Spring 2005 review of *Drawing on Beckett*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Tel Aviv: Assaph Books, 2004). The special price for Beckett Society members is hardcover: \$20.50 plus \$6.50 air mail postage; paperback: \$12.00 plus \$6.50 air mail postage. Further information can be found at [www.tau.ac.il/arts](http://www.tau.ac.il/arts).

# Contributors

- Steve Barfield is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Westminster, UK.
- Mary Bryden is Professor of European Literature at Cardiff University. She has published widely on Beckett and is a former President of the Samuel Beckett Society.
- Cristina Cano-Vara is a PhD candidate at the Autonoma University of Madrid. She is writing a thesis entitled "Translating Beckett's Stage Texts Twice: Literary and Theatrical 'Concretizations' Mediating and Mediated by Reception" under the direction of Antonia Rodriguez-Gago. As part of her research, she has published some articles about the translation and production of Beckett's theatre in Spain. She was also commissioned to translate *Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape* Krapp for the productions reviewed in her article.
- Cristina Figueredo teaches English Literature at the University of Buenos Aires and belongs to both a research project and a Seminar on Samuel Beckett directed by Dr. Laura Cerrato. Besides her interest in the work of Beckett, she has specialized in Medieval Studies and has recently completed an MA in Medieval Literature at the University of York (UK). Apart from a number of articles on English literature which have appeared elsewhere, she has published several articles in *Beckettiana*.
- Joël Jouanneau's Beckett productions include *En attendant Godot* (1991), *La dernière bande* (1994), *Fin de partie*, and a stage version of *Compagnie* (1995). His stage version of Imre Kertész's *Kaddish pour un enfant qui ne naîtra pas* was featured this year at the Beckett festival sponsored by L'Association pour la Maison Samuel-Beckett in Roussillon.
- Ronan McDonald is Director of the Beckett International Foundation and a lecturer in the School of English at the University of Reading. He is the author of *Tragedy and Irish Literature* and the forthcoming *Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (2006), together with numerous articles and reviews on Irish and British literature.
- David Pattie is Reader in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Chester. He is the author of *The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett* (2000) and a number of articles on Beckett, contemporary performance, and contemporary culture.
- Robert Reginio is currently completing a Ph.D. in modern literature for the English Department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. His work on Beckett focuses on the drama in the context of historical catastrophe and the attendant problematization of memory.

## The Beckett Circle Le Cercle de Beckett

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**General Editor:** Thomas Cousineau  
**Book Review Editor:** Derval Tubridy  
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**Thomas Cousineau**  
Department of English  
Washington College  
300 Washington Avenue  
Chestertown, MD 21620  
Tel: (410) 778-7770  
Fax: (410) 778-7891  
e-mail: [tcousineau2@washcoll.edu](mailto:tcousineau2@washcoll.edu)

Inquiries concerning book reviews should be sent to:  
**Derval Tubridy**  
Department of English and Comparative Literature  
Goldsmith College  
London, SE 14 6NW  
England  
e-mail: [d.tubridy@gold.ac.uk](mailto:d.tubridy@gold.ac.uk)

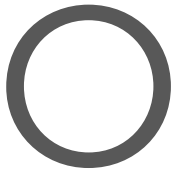
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For membership enquiries, write to:

Professor Enoch Brater  
Department of English Language and Literature  
3187 Angell Hall  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1003  
USA  
Tel: (734) 764-2275  
Email: enochb@umich.edu

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