



THE BECKETT CIRCLE LE CERCLE DE BECKETT

Newsletter of the Samuel Beckett Society

Gate/Beckett at Lincoln Center

The achievement of simplicity in the theater is a matter of extraordinary complexity. Lighting, set, speech, the acting itself—all must all be directed toward undoing, and what doing that takes! No one understood better than Beckett that the wonder of the aesthetic, whatever the genre, resides in that kind of shaping of energy—whence his preoccupation with “unwording” the text. Deriving from the failure endemic to language to render rather than merely circumscribe, this is a notion that bears an obvious likeness to some modernist painters’ striving to make invisible art, to make paintings in which there was nothing to see. In certain of his paintings, Rothko, for instance, subverted the visual experience by avoiding subjects (narrative or abstract) that could distract the viewer from the act of seeing itself.¹ Similarly, some five years prior to his oft-cited letter to acquaintance Axel Kaun—where he asked, “Is there any reason why that terrible materiality if the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example, the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven’s seventh symphony [...]?”²—Beckett wrote in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* of the need to undo the seeing of saying that impedes the saying of seeing.

Perhaps never before has Beckett’s (an) aesthetic project been so extraordinarily well conceived and executed as in the Gate Theater’s staging of three pieces, not one of which, paradoxically, was written for the theater: *Eh Joe*, starring Liam Neeson, Beckett’s 1965 play for television; *First Love*, with Ralph Fiennes, based on the 1965 novella; and *I’ll Go On*, the adaptation of the 1950s trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*) performed by Barry McGovern. The three ran in repertory, with the exception of two five-hour marathon evenings at which one could indulge in all three, at New York City’s Lincoln Center Festival from July 16-27. And what a truly wondrous run it was! Once again, and maybe even better than ever before, the Dublin group with Michael Colgan at the artistic helm, served Beckett exceedingly well.

In fact, performance in the service of the author/playwright is precisely what made this flow of Beckettian “saying of seeing” such a treat. Everything in the artistry of those responsible for the lighting, sets, and costumes allowed Beckett’s language to remain visibly in the foreground. What we saw through Atom Egoyan’s superlative directing of *Eh Joe* (revised for this production by Nigel Redden), Michael Colgan’s equally fine directing of *First Love*, and the every



Barry McGovern in *I’ll Go On*.

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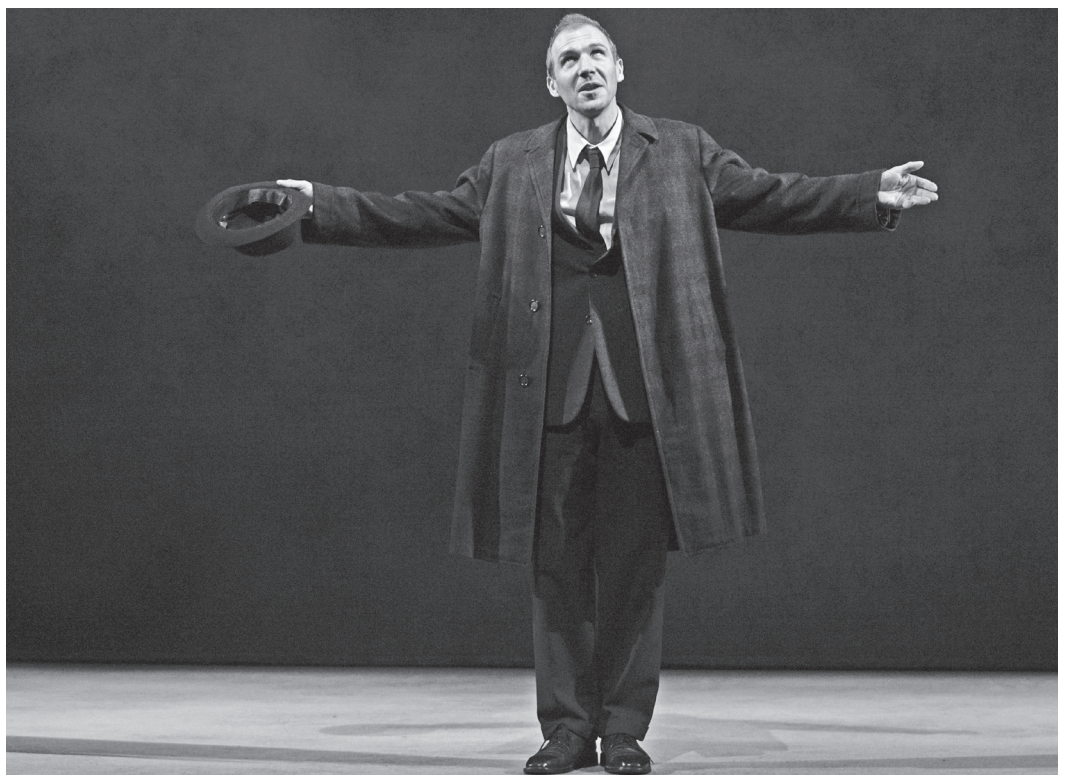
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Message

Fall 2008
Volume 31
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bit as masterful direction of *I'll Go On* by Colm O Briain, was Beckett's own vision. The question of the kinds of liberties to be taken with the work of a playwright so famously precise in his scenic indications will never be resolved. Just how a director makes his artistic mark on a production when so much is determined by the writer himself has long been debated.³ But staging works not written for the theater deepens the problem: How to legitimize the transfer from the page to the stage? How to remain entirely faithful to a vision not conceived for the theater? Those are the conundrums to which these three directors so admirably responded.

But what, more precisely, was responsible for such success? In *Eh Joe*, surely it was the juxtaposition of Neeson, seated silent and almost motionless on his bed near the rear of the stage, with Neeson, overtaken by the voice inside his head, projected via scrim and camera stage front. So too it was the way in which the delicacy of James McConnell's lighting worked with the unobtrusive, drab even, beige tones in Eileen Diss' design that in turn blended with the dressing gown and slippers worn by Neeson—the unity in all that. But mostly it was the timing and subtlety of the actor's movements: of the walk to the window in search of assurance before closing it and drawing the curtain; of the peering out the door before locking it and drawing its hanging for much the same reason; of the hand quivers before the bedspread was lifted to rule out potentially externalized inner demons. Mostly it was the intensity of Neeson's haunted angular face on the screen, the anguish so evident there as Penelope Wilton's punishing voiceover called forth, with just the right cadence and inflection, memories of insufficient caring and excessive self-absorption. Mostly it was Neeson's carrying his audience "Behind the eyes," as Beckett called it, there where all the pain, the fears, the longing reside—in "that penny farthing hell you call your mind"—there where voices whisper and torture so that a squeeze of the eyes, an ever-so-slight turn of the head, a mouth increasingly agape is all that can be achieved in response.

In *First Love*, success again arose from the simplicity of what took place on the stage and the privileging of Beckett's text above anything that might detract from its overdetermined meanings and play. Colgan, in fact, is reported to have said, "Put the actor downstage center, looking at audience, feet firmly rooted to ground, no hieroglyphics, just telling you a story so you don't lose a word."⁴ And, indeed, those words were anything but lost! First produced as part of the Sidney Festival 2007, this staging



Ralph Fiennes in *First Love*.

of Beckett's novella with a running time of 55 minutes was, in fact, played very much for the language, but also for the laughs. This is to say that the many sub-texts apparent to the reader were not possible to capture without text in hand and that the listener instead was invited on a narrative journey far more uni-layered than the experience of reading Beckett's work affords. The Oedipal significance of the title alone and its appearance in the opening line where the narrator, "rightly or wrongly," associates his marriage to his father's death are cases in point. Nevertheless, the intelligence of Beckett's wit became all that much more palpable in the hands of (or, more properly stated, in the mouth of) so gifted an actor as Ralph Fiennes. Aided by the simplest, yet most innovative of sets—wherein a single bench, the only focal point (other than the actor), yielded to an ever-so-dimly lighted door or window visible at strategic moments behind a translucent cloth drop—Fiennes' account of his unwelcome engagement with Lulu (whom he also calls Anna) was painful, but hilarious as well. Beckett's humor is all-too-often under-appreciated in favor of his philosophically and psycho-dynamically apt truths. But this production went very far in remedying that.

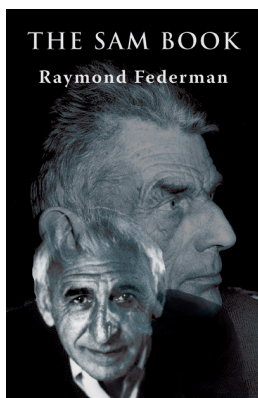
"You can't leave," McGovern smugly informed his audience in a music hall-like introduction to *I'll Go On*. "Because you're afraid it might be worse elsewhere." And worse elsewhere it surely would have been. Before a smart set designed by Robert Ballagh and finely lit by McConnell—a set which cleverly morphed from landscape (*Molloy*) to mausoleum (*Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*)—and clad in a peculiar sort of nightshirt, the actor caressed every word as it fell from his mouth until there were none left to say—and still he said on. And on. And increasingly faster. Til the breath-taking rapidity of *Not I* (particularly as performed by Billie Whitelaw) became an obvious intertex-

tual reference. With this incessant speech that impeded his own grand if definitive departure, McGovern's character embodied all the strangeness, naïveté, irony, contempt, wisdom, and humor we associate with Beckett's trilogy. And again it was the ability to bring Beckett's narrative vision—that Irish yet universal vision—to the stage and inscribe it in gesture and movement (and the sonority of the actor's own Irishness) that made for a winning performance. But there was also this: McGovern was brilliant in a way that comes not only from talent and honing of craft, but from a deep "knowing" of the material at hand. He has acted in many a Beckett play (in *Godot* alone, he's been Vladimir, Estragon, and Lucky!) and inhabited these words excerpted by him (with the assistance of academic Gerry Dukes) for some 200 plus performances. McGovern "knows" how to interpret Beckett's 'saying of seeing' like few if any others. That is why, despite all the other playwrights whose work he also performs, it is to what he calls "the Beckett thing" that, luckily for us, he returns again and again.

-Lois Oppenheim

Notes

- 1 See Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1993), 101, and my *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 47-48.
- 2 In *Disjecta*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 172.
- 3 See my *Directing Beckett* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).
- 4 Cited by Matthew Gurewitsch I "Samuel Beckett, From Everywhere but the Stage," *New York Times*, July 20th, 2008, Arts and Leisure Section, 6.



THE SAM BOOK

Raymond Federman
Translated by Sharon Blackie

Available for the first time in English
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In 1963, renowned Franco-American author Raymond Federman – then a young academic, just fresh from defending his PhD – met Samuel Beckett in Paris. The meeting was to change his life. 'Sam' became both a great friend and a great source of inspiration to Federman throughout his writing career. Intensely moving and intensely funny by turns, this unique book is both a memoir of a friendship, and a typically Federman-esque tribute to Beckett and his work. *The Sam Book* brings together memories, anecdotes, extracts from articles and talks, and other pieces of writing that derive their inspiration directly from Beckett's work.

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Beckett in Rome

The "Beckett in Rome" Conference was held at the University of Rome, "Tor Vergata," 17-19 April 2008, and was organized by Daniela Guardamagna and Rossana Sebellin, with the support of the Scientific Committee: Chris Ackerley, Enoch Brater and Daniela Caselli. A number of the most distinguished international Beckett scholars took part, as well as promising young scholars from many universities throughout the world.

The Conference opened on the afternoon of the 17th with two sessions, "Beckett and Dante" and "Beckett and Translation." The first, chaired by Daniela Guardamagna and Lina Unali, was opened by John Pilling with an extremely interesting and knowledgeable plenary lecture, drawn from his lifelong study of Beckett. He successfully proved many subtle relationships between Beckett and several major and lesser known Italian poets and writers. Pilling was followed by Daniela Caselli, who brought her profound knowledge of both Dante and Beckett into play. She spoke on intertextuality in the forms of direct quotation and parody. Seán Lawlor followed with an *exposé* of the very stimulating links between Beckett's poems *hors crâne* and *dreamday* and Dante, which included an examination of Beckett's manuscripts.

The session on Beckett and translation was chaired by Carla Locatelli. Rossana Sebellin opened with a case study of the problem of self-translation in the double versions of *Play* and *Not I*. Sebellin proposed the idea of a "double original" rather than a translation from the original to a secondary version. Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle followed with one of their fascinating expositions of their massive work (in progress) on Beckett's marginalia, his library and the use he made of his enormously wide culture (hence a wider definition of translation). The project they are developing will make Beckett's manuscripts available for digital consultation through transliterated handwritten passages and hyperlinks for internal reference. Bill Prosser's talk concentrated on an inter-semiotic kind of translation, that is, on the relationship between Beckett's texts and his drawings, doodles and graphic creations. Underpinning Prosser's talk were several enlarged reproductions of Beckett's doodles, on show in the permanent exhibition during the conference. Mariacristina Cavecchi presented the volume edited by Caroline Patey and herself, and centered her talk upon the ideal "museum" of chairs in Beckett's works.

Two performances concluded the day. The first was by Rosemary Pountney, whose readings of passages from Beckett's drama and prose created a mesmerizing atmosphere. The second was by Ninny Aiuto, a young scholar and writer who is working on his Sicilian translation of *Waiting for Godot*, who read a brief extract of his work with a young actor and colleague, Francesco Teresi, illustrating the effective ability of Beckett's texts to override both linguistic and cultural barriers.

On the morning of the 18th, Chris Ackerley chaired the first part of a rich session on Beckett's drama. Giuseppina Restivo's plenary lecture investigated the relationship

between Joyce's *Exiles*, Leopardi and Beckett's *Endgame*, demonstrating very effectively the presence of both Joyce and Leopardi and their conspicuous influence on Beckett's work. Hugo Bowles, lecturer at "Tor Vergata," contributed a linguistics/pragmatics based analysis of *Endgame*, describing Nagg's and Hamm's varied usages of storytelling in the text, and using linguistic tools to reveal meanings that might otherwise only be grasped intuitively by the literary critic. Patrizia Fusella spoke about the little analyzed relationship between Beckett's *Ghost Trio* and Beethoven's Trio *Der Geist*, convincingly showing how the musical structure of Beethoven's Trio is employed by Beckett in the composition of his own piece.

Enoch Brater's plenary lecture "The Sitting Figure on Beckett's Stage" was both extremely knowledgeable and entertaining. He demonstrated how in almost all his plays Beckett draws from the repository of Western drama—from Shakespeare to Ibsen and Chekhov among others—to recreate the *topos* in his own very personal artistic approach. This talk was based on a forthcoming book-length study of the topic.

The first part of the following session, "Beckett on Stage", was chaired by Rosana Sebellin and opened with Stan Gontarski's outstanding plenary lecture on recent Beckett performances. He questioned prevailing conceptions of fidelity while hypothesising a new kind of fidelity, one able to reproduce the disruptive effects of Beckett's first productions on audiences. The debate following this lecture was long and stimulating. A fruitful contribution to the discussion was offered by Rosemary Pountney, who followed with her presentation on "The Demands of Beckett's Staging," leading to a discussion of her own experiences as actress as well as Beckett scholar.

The second part of the session was chaired by Enoch Brater, and opened with Daniela Guardamagna's presentation on Carlo Cecchi's production of *Endgame*. Working again from the premise of fidelity to Beckett's texts, Guardamagna examined the possibilities of achieving equilibrium between invention and fidelity. In "Godot Beyond the Wall," Erin Post discussed performances of Beckett in German, American and Swedish penitentiaries. Drawing upon her interesting doctoral on Genet, Beckett and Weiss, she examined the peculiar receptiveness of prisoners to this play, whereby the audience participation in the plight of the prisoners/actors intensifies awareness of their own condition. Anastasia Deligianni also discussed a non-professional performance, this time the experiment of a *Godot* production staged in Athens. Her study of the unsophisticated response of children to this highbrow play yielded valuable insights.

Chris Ackerley's fascinating plenary lecture, at once very scholarly and charmingly humorous, discussed voluntary and involuntary memory in Beckett, with particular reference to *Krapp's Last Tape* and his essay on Proust.

The closing session of the day was chaired by Edo Bellingeri and Daniela Zizzari, both from "Tor Vergata."

Here Laura Caretti, Professor of Drama, analyzed a series of Italian performances of *Happy Days*. She then introduced and actively contributed to the performance-talk of Giulia Lazzarini, the great actress who played Strehler's Winnie throughout Europe. This event, which closed the second day, was both intellectually challenging and very moving, as Giulia evoked Winnie's last words and song in which she strives to overcome despair and the prospect of death.

The following day started with a session on Beckett's prose chaired by John Pilling. It opened with Mary Bryden's very precise, exceedingly stimulating talk on the relationship between Beckett and Hélène Cixous, both from the point of view of the tormented attitude of the French writer to her more famous contemporary, and of a very convincing analysis of textual correspondences and Beckettian echoes in her work. Shane Weller's talk was devoted to the existing criticism by Adorno on Beckett, with particular emphasis upon Adorno's unpublished thoughts on *The Unnamable*. Weller analyzed marginalia from Adorno's copy of the novel to substantiate his claims.

Two parallel sessions followed. In the first, chaired by Hugo Bowles, Garcia-Hubard and Sinoimeri presented their joint research on *Comment c'est*, discussing its form which is devised to incorporate chaos. Lorenzo

Orlandini's pleasant and very well-informed paper dealt with Beckett's treatment of sexuality in his early fiction, in particular *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. In the second session, chaired by Elisabetta Marino, Raffaella Cantillo traced the desiccation of Beckett's prose from the early novels to the later ones, a process already discernable in *Murphy*. Heather Gardner presented an interesting paper on *Company* and convincingly demonstrated the influence on Beckett's work of linguist Fritz Mauthner, which he read in 1932.

Carla Locatelli opened the session on "Beckett and Philosophers" with a very stimulating plenary lecture in which she formulated the convincingly traced a consistent deconstructive stance in Beckett's poetry throughout his literary career, over and above his other stylistic developments.

More parallel sessions were held in the morning: the first was chaired again by Hugo Bowles. Anthony Cordingley showed the presence of Stoic philosophy and of Aristotelian elements in Beckett's later prose, and Abeer Al Tayeb discussed the interest Derrida had for Beckett's writing; in the second, chaired by Heather Gardner, David Tucker showed the influence of the Occasionalist philosopher Arnold Geulinx on Beckett's novels *Murphy* and *The Unnamable*. In his paper on Beckett's prose, David Addyman debated the importance of an approach to these works based on space as a philosophical concept.

The late session, "Beckett and the Anxiety of Influence," was devoted to striking parallelisms between Beckett and other authors' works. It was chaired by Daniela Caselli, and opened with Peter Boxall's talk on the presence of Beckett in recent works by Bellow, Coetzee, and DeLillo.

The last two parallel sessions, chaired respectively by Daniela Guardamagna and Rossana Sebellin, started with the presentation of Roberta Cauchi Santoro's paper on the relationships between Marinetti and Beckett. Seb Franklin's pleasant talk convincingly discussed the idea of a *post-factum* link of Beckett with science fiction and horror cinema. Iain Bailey offered a scholarly talk on the influence of the Bible on Beckett's work. Davide Crosara demonstrated the influence of Milton and Romantic poetry on Beckett's later prose and drama. Mario Faraone employed Zen Buddhism as a critical tool to read Beckett's *noluntas*, especially in the early dramatic works. Finally, Lino Belleghia showed the influence of Ejzenstein's cinema on Beckett's *Film*.

The conference was very wittily closed by John Pilling. He entertained the attendees who had bravely remained until the end of a late Saturday afternoon, summarizing some of the results of the conference and enlivening the talk with some in-jokes as to the names of the delegates (from *Echos Bones* for Enoch Brater to *Divina Commedia* for Daniela Caselli). The Proceedings, edited by Daniela Guardamagna and Rossana Sebellin, are in progress, and will be published on-line and in print by Laterza University Press at the beginning of 2009.

--Rossana Sebellin

Samuel Beckett Working Group

The Samuel Beckett Working Group will convene at the 2009 conference of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR/FIRT), which will be held 14-17 July in Lisbon, Portugal, organized by the University of Lisbon. The general theme for the conference is "Silent Voices/Hidden Lives: Censorship in Performance." Some of the relevant, suggested topics under this title include:

Drama under Close Scrutiny

The Genres: Art Responding to Ideological

Constraints

Composing over Silence

Breaking the Walls to Reach Elsewhere

Setting the Scene for/against the Repressed Other

Spectres of Invisibility or Haunting Absences

Strategies of Survival under Empires

Performing Memories

Working Groups may choose this theme or select one of their own. The Beckett group has done both, the papers sometimes addressing the central theme, at other times focusing with great success on one Beckett work. As usual, I'll canvas past members to get their input for the coming year.

Anyone with questions, suggestions for topics, and interest in participating in the 2009 Lisbon Working Group, please contact me Lindabz@post.tau.ac.il

Announcements of the topic will be sent out by 1 December. Abstracts are due 15 February, and notification of acceptance 1 March. All participants must be members of both the Beckett Society and IFTR. For further information, check the IFTR Website and the Beckett Working Group link. All registration and hotel arrangements for the conference are booked through IFTR.



Photo courtesy of David Hou, Brian Dennehy, at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival

Krapp's Last Tape: An Actor's Perspective

Krapp's Last Tape is a "play." It's tempting to forget this when we encounter a playwright like Samuel Beckett, whose carefully written words sometimes seem anything but "playful." But we call Beckett a "playwright," not an author, because the written word is the beginning point for crafting a performance that is played out between audience, actor, and playwright.

I recently had the opportunity to see the American actor Brian Dennehy perform the role of Krapp at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario, Canada. In addition, Mr. Dennehy agreed to an interview the day after the performance. Our conversation provided several insights into how the "crafting" of a Beckett play actually works.

The Stratford Shakespeare Festival presented a double-bill of the two one-act plays, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Hughie* by Eugene O'Neill, both featuring Brian Dennehy. He has won two Tony awards for best lead actor in *Death of a Salesman* in 1999, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in 2003. He also has an impressive career in television and film, including roles in *Gorky Park*, *Ratatouille*, and *Cocoon*. The double-bill opened June 18 and ran through August 31 in the intimate Studio Theatre, one of 4 stages at the Festival. The semi-circular arrangement of seats in the Studio gives the audience a personal connection with the performers—a

perfect place to see these intimate works.

This is the first time the Festival has presented *Krapp's Last Tape*, although *Waiting for Godot* has been presented four times, in 1968, 1984, 1996, and 1998. The only other Beckett performances were *Four Plays by Samuel Beckett* in 1978 and a workshop version of *Endgame* in 1967.

My conversation with Brian Dennehy took place at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario, Canada on August 1, 2008, the day after I had seen the remarkable actor on stage. His performance of *Krapp's Last Tape* has been critically acclaimed by reviewers and audiences alike. Even the extended run sold out.

I arrived early, as did he, in the lobby of the Festival Theatre. There is no mistaking his large frame and casual walk. After we were introduced he wanted to know where the rest of the "Beckett Circle" was. Apparently he was expecting a large group. When I explained that I alone would be doing the interview he laughed, ordered coffee, and started talking. I began by asking him how *Hughie* came to be paired with *Krapp*. The pairing of these two plays was Dennehy's own idea, as he explained:

It was my idea actually at first. [...] [W]e knew we wanted to do *Hughie* up here. Then I wanted to do something with it. Not just that alone. I was working in Vancouver. . .with John Hurt and Hurt had just done it, and I said "How long does it run?" and he said "45 minutes." And I said "Damn," because I was looking for a companion piece for *Hughie*. So I read it, and I remember calling a bunch of people who shall be nameless and saying I have an idea, and everybody's reaction at that point was "No, you can't do those plays together," because they were both "*sui generis*," they are what they are, and need to be seen alone, by themselves, unless you do a Beckett collection. But where is it written down? [...] And then Chris Jones who writes for the Chicago Tribune came to see it. He actually wrote that it was a hell of an idea to put these plays together.

Hugie was first on the program and the similarities of the works by these two Nobel Prize winning playwrights, O'Neill and Beckett, are astonishing and cannot be missed. On the surface, *Hughie* is about a small-time gambler and "craps" player returning to his flea-bag hotel after an unsuccessful evening. The play's title "*Hughie*" actually refers to the recently deceased former night clerk and the person whose loss is mourned by Erie, played by Dennehy. Erie boasts about his exploits to the new night clerk, who is unresponsive and has a "Beckettian" manner of staring into space with a blank expression. Under that blank expression, there is another complete life written in by O'Neill, much as Beckett writes interior monologues for his characters to be played and not spoken. The new night clerk featured a fine droll performance by the only other actor in the program, Joe Grifasi.

There are multiple layers to the night clerk, one layer that we see and another that O'Neill gives in lengthy and elaborate stage directions. The clerk's interior life is actually spoken in some productions, but not in this one. There is an interior monologue for the night clerk exactly as there

is for many of Beckett's characters, a detailed and specific monologue that is unheard by the audience. In this case we are not privileged to the textual version of the play. We can't get past that stony exterior to the missing monologue; we are cut off from the interior life of the character. The idea of loss and a profound sense of isolation thus play key roles in the works of O'Neill and Beckett.

According to Dennehy, there is a difference between O'Neill's absent monologue and Krapp's silence:

It's interesting; the problem Beckett sets up at the beginning of the play, and repeats at the end of the play, is that the man is sitting there, and your first reaction would be to say, "Well, he's thinking." One of the hardest things in the world to try to act is somebody who is not doing anything. He is not thinking, all he is doing is existing in time. His mind is not going anyplace, sunk inside himself, his eyes are looking inside. And even as they look inside they don't see anything, there's nothing there. It's one of those Beckettian moments where he says that this is what man mostly does.

Dennehy went on further to say about the main characters in these two plays that they are

two similar characters in their genes, in their genetic structure. [...] [I]t's amazing how similar the subject is. And more importantly, how these one-act plays, these 45-minute plays, so perfectly characterize the playwrights' works. *Krapp's Last Tape* is a paradigm of Beckett's writing. *Hughie* is a paradigm of what O'Neill was saying—What does it take to get through the day? The long day which is repeated endlessly, endlessly. It's funny because it's Beckett's point of view, "I can't go on, I'll go on." That's all. That's Beckett, but it's also O'Neill. How do I get through the night? What am I going to do tomorrow, when I have to start all over again? And certainly that's what Beckett does.

Dennehy was also intensely interested in explaining exactly how much Beckett and O'Neill were alike as personalities.

Beckett probably enjoyed most of his life, but at the same time it was a very weird kind of enjoyment, I mean, in spite of what he wrote, he definitely was a narcissist. [...] They actually looked alike, as they had those hatchet faces and they both dressed expensively, and Beckett must have been the most photographed playwright in history. He always had a photographer around, he never said no to a photographer.

After a short intermission, the second play *Krapp's Last Tape* began, and it began with silence. The stage was dark. There was nothing. Then a spool of light surrounded a table filled with tape tins at the right and a tape recorder on the other end of the table. A single light with a triangular light shade hung above a simple desk chair. Along the back of the empty dark brick wall was a single open doorway with a long light chain hanging in the center. We saw Krapp sitting. Finally he looked up, swallowed, leaned back in his chair, and looked up at the light above the table. Eventually he goes to the front of the table, unlocks the drawers and finds a banana.

The “play” of the banana is a key scene in any Krapp production, and this production’s approach is worth exploring. During my interview I asked Brian Dennehy to elaborate on the meaning of this scene, and he stated that this was the epitome of Beckett’s view—the absurdity of life.

The most difficult stage note to figure out was his rather cavalier description of the banana peel. He drops it on the floor, and then he walks back once to the side. Well, it’s obvious what he was getting at, you know, which is life is absurd most of the time, and slapstick comedy, mistaken identity, slipping on a banana peel. Most human beings are architects of their own destruction, their own stupidity, their own decisions. But of course you have to figure out how you’re going to do that. Obviously what he would prefer is someone like Bill Irwin, a great accomplished clown, or Buster Keaton, whom he worked with, and of course Bert Lahr. But he knew how to do a prat fall, and I don’t. [...] So we figured out what he was getting at is that man does something either accidentally, or on purpose, which brings him to grief. Which is [...] the first five minutes of the play, him peeling the banana, dropping the peel on the floor, walking in a distracted way, slipping on the banana peel—it’s a vital part of the book. It’s what he’s done with his life: he’s created the seeds of his own destruction. So what I felt was, you know what, let’s play that, let’s play the fact that he doesn’t realize at the time he’s dropped it, it just falls. His mind is someplace else, he begins to walk, then he notices the banana peel. But when he notices the banana peel, and he edges around it, steps over it, it doesn’t occur to him at that point to pick it up, actually get rid of it. [...] It occurred to me that if Krapp were to deliberately challenge nature, deliberately to take a chance with this [...] old thing, the banana peel, that you don’t step on a banana peel, because you’ll slip. But he says, “How about

if I do? What happens if I do slip up? Can I stand on the banana peel, step on it, and kick it and NOT get hurt?” And he begins to do it, begins to fool around, and then he makes the decision that he’s ready, and of course he slips and he gets hurt. So that was our solution. It allowed us to do it, to do the, I guess, the philosophical basis of it, which is how much can he get away with, challenging the rules of nature, which is, “Don’t step on a banana peel, if you do, you’re gonna fall.”

In the actual production, Krapp fell backwards onto the table, unexpectedly, and was visibly hurt. The audience gasped. There was no laughter. It was such a powerful scene because I was uncertain if this was part of the stage experience or if Dennehy was actually hurt. He now appeared to be physically damaged as well as emotionally damaged. This actual physical pain was not an interpretation I had seen in previous productions. To me it was the most memorable moment of the play.

In our hour-long interview Dennehy went on to explain the challenges of interpreting or making the smallest changes to Beckett’s notoriously meticulous and closely-protected work. Speaking of the many productions of Krapp that Beckett himself was involved with,

There is a plethora of material about the various productions that were done, and despite what people say, there was a great deal of flexibility. [...] You realize he pretty much changed it every time. [...] Of course, being the playwright he could do that. What we felt is that that gave us the license to pick and choose from the things he had done [...] with the lines exactly as written, the essential physical production is exactly the way it’s written.

Sometimes what looks like a conscious, symbolic choice is part of the process necessary to transform text into performance. The perception of a scene and the technical reality can be quite different. There was a touching scene when Krapp embraced the tape recorder as if it were a woman. I questioned Dennehy on what I saw as an intentionally,

slightly hopeful gesture: “It felt like you had something to hold onto, even if it was just a memory.” His response surprised me:

A lot of that has to do with being able to get to the switch. The thing is you get into things technical. If you’re sitting with your hands on the desk and you’re listening to the tape and there are critical things happening on the tape—you want people to listen to the tape, but you want them to watch YOU. So if you have your hand here and they get used to that so

Photo courtesy of David Hou, Brian Dennehy, ad the Stratford Shakespeare Festival



you can just flick it, then you have a better chance of keeping focus where you want it to be. The tape is not actually playing. It's moving but the sound is coming from off stage.

There were times when Dennehy and director Jennifer Tarvey, whom he would love to work with again, collaborated on the meaning of a particular action in the play:

We actually had a debate, Jennifer and I, and I remember saying "This is one of those places you leave Mr. Beckett behind." I said, "It would be interesting if, in this moment of deep funk, where he's sunk back into whatever the hell it is, existence, that the tape ran out, and it was just doing a click, click, click." And she said, "Beckett doesn't say that!" But she made a really good philosophical point which I had to admit which is, "No! It goes on. The tape just goes on, and on, and on. Nothing's playing on it, but all of us just go on." So that's why we do it.

And as an explanation of why Dennehy likes working with plays by O'Neill and now Beckett, he added in his colorful way:

It certainly helps to be an Irish-American. [...] This combination of primitive understanding of nature, of life, and death. One of the things modern society has done [...] is erase the primitive acceptance of life and death and humor and tragedy which are always all mixed up. But these guys know, Irishmen know, that that's not true. It doesn't make any difference what you do or how you do it, you can't escape that great final joke, that big slide down the hill. And yet they're prepared to laugh at it, they're prepared to point their fingers at it and say, "There it is, look at it, watch out, but there it is!" And laugh at the same time. So, yeah, I tune into that, I mean I get that. [...] There is some eloquence to them that I get.

Brian Dennehy does get it. And this was an eloquent, insightful performance of *Krapp's Last Tape*.

--Daina Giesler

Sponsored by The Irish Studies Program and Department of English at Saint Mary's University

Queering Ireland: An international inter-disciplinary conference

Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Canada
18-20 September 2009

Writing in 1931, Daniel Corkery declared that "the normal and the national are synonymous in literary criticism." Yet this potent collocation of the normal and the national in Irish life need not be confined to the realm of Irish letters. An enduring preoccupation with normalcy and nationality has long been evident in all spheres of Irish life, and continues to resonate today. Queer studies is uniquely placed to interrogate how these concerns have been imbricated in Irish culture since, as Michael Warner has remarked, queer theory is predicated on "a thoroughgoing resistance to regimes of the normal." Recent cultural production in Ireland has already shown a persistent and compelling interest in queerness, but what are the implications of this resistance to the normal for an understanding of how bodies, sexualities and desires have been imagined, constructed, and represented in Irish culture? What potential does queering Ireland have in charting new directions in queer theory and queer approaches to culture in general? What is specific about queerness in the queer Ireland project? Papers are invited addressing Ireland's regimes of the normal and the national in all disciplines including law, medicine, economics, literature, art history, film and media studies, sociology, history, political science and religious studies. Proposals should not be confined to the modern period only, and we are especially interested in papers that ad-

dress the contemporary and historical Irish-speaking world. Queering Ireland is meant to address the queer Irish experiences across periods and cultural genres and fields as well as queering what is presented as the "normal" Irish experience.

Possible topics might include:

The queer body politic/The queer political body
Global Irish capitalism and gay identity
Historicizing Irish queerness
Gay, lesbian, bi- and trans-sexual Irish culture
Queer(ing) Irish literature
Filming Irish Queerness/Queering Irish film
The queer Irish body in medical, religious and legal discourse
Mother Ireland and Queer Culture
Normalcy and nation
Queering the Straight

Proposals not exceeding 500-words (or one single-spaced page) should be sent electronically, with name, complete mailing address, e-mail, phone and fax numbers, to Sean.Kennedy@smu.ca and Goran.Stanivukovic@smu.ca by 16 January 2009.

ESSAY

All that Fall on Stage

The 2008 spring production season of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London offered an unusual treat for even the most jaded of Beckettian palates: a fully staged production of the 1956 radio play, *All that Fall*.

The play was directed by William Gaskill, who honed his directorial skills at the Royal Court Theatre with George Devine from 1957 to 1960 then worked with Laurence Olivier to create the National Theatre from 1963 to 1965. He left the National when George Devine had his first heart attack and asked him to take over at the Court in 1965. He was Artistic Director there for seven years, being joined by Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page. Later he co-founded the Joint Stock Theatre Company with Max Stafford-Clark, David Hare and David Aukin. This rarissime event at RADA took place as a direct result of a personal letter from Bill Gaskill to Edward Beckett. In the past, such a request would regularly have received the answer “no,” first from Beckett himself, then, after his death, from his literary executors, Jérôme Lindon and Edward. The latter gave his permission in this particular case only because it was a limited-run production by students in a small, non-commercial theatre—and, perhaps, because it was Gaskill who was asking and directing.

There is no doubt that Samuel Beckett was opposed to any staging of his radio plays. His correspondence is full of refusals and explanations as to why he did not want *All that Fall* done in the theatre. To Barney Rosset, he wrote that the play was “a radio text, for voices, not bodies” and that it depended on its “coming out of the dark” for any quality that it had. He went on “frankly the thought of *All that Fall* on a stage, however discreetly, is intolerable to me” (27 Aug. 1957). He even refused his favored American director, Alan Schneider, writing that the play “really is for radio only. It has been tried in some out of the way theatres, in the dark and with faces only lit.” He had also held out, he said, against the “very insistent” Oliviers who wanted to “dramatize it,” concluding “I think better leave it were it belongs” (1 Sept. 1974). In 1963 he agreed to a French TV film of Robert Pinget’s translation, *Tous ceux qui tombent*, but bitterly regretted the “disastrous results” of the film, directed by Michel Mitrani. Later that year, he refused Ingmar Bergman permission to stage it with *Embers* in Sweden. Nonetheless, although generally only readings in a theatre were permitted, he gave Deryk Mendel permission to stage a production at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin in 1966. With the exception of the German production, this RADA version is certainly the most fully staged version ever mounted. Does it work? If so, how and why? And does it raise questions about the licensing of future productions of what by common consent is an outstanding piece of writing?

The studio theatre used at RADA, known locally as the G.B.S. (i.e. the George Bernard Shaw Theatre), is a theatre in the round with only 70 seats. In a configuration especially

contrived for this production, the audience is seated on three sides of the studio with some rows of raised seats, leaving pathways through which the actors can enter and exit. Those actors not involved at the time occupy chairs in the semi-darkness along the other wall and from there imitate the various animal noises. This use of empty space and surrounding sounds is one explanation for the success of this highly inventive production: no-one ever pretends that they are part of anything other than an imagined, totally fabricated theatrical world; all is “just play.” The dominating reality is the reality of pretence, mime, caricature and farce. So although we are faced with real-life actors who are aged artificially by make-up and period costumes, there is no insistence on making them look convincingly old. From the very beginning, and very much in keeping with the spirit of the original radio script, we encounter various layers of irreality and make-belief.

One of the highlights of the production is the use made of movement and mime. For this, Gaskill brought in a talented, highly experienced movement teacher, Toby Sedgwick. He was schooled at the famous Jacques Lecoq school of mime in Paris, has worked with the Théâtre de Complicité, and was a recent winner of an Olivier award for his work on Michael Morpurgo’s *Warhorse* at the National Theatre. Gaskill also enlisted one of Britain’s leading designers, Hayden Griffin, to conjure up a richly inventive world which is grounded in reality by its themes and its language and not by naturalistic representation. So Christy leads a hinny made up of a female and a male actor, one behind the other. The woman at the front has long hair which she tosses like a mane when she whinnies or as she imitates a loud farting noise, “very fresh in herself today.” The cart itself has an axle and spokes but no surrounding rim, with a plank carried by two actors. Mr. Tyler does not ride an actual bicycle; instead, he holds a pair of handlebars with a bell out in front of him: he rings the bell, but dismounts elaborately and comically from his imaginary bike. Mr. Slocum drives a car consisting of a few wooden chairs that are brought on by the actors. Into this make-shift car a quivering Mrs. Rooney is hoisted from the rear by the driver. Sound is replaced here, or rather backed up by mime. Gaskill said: “One could have done it more minimally, as a semi-reading, with only the slightest indication of the physical things, the cart and so on. But I decided to go ahead and create mimetically the cart and the car and the bicycle and the flight of steps—and, through lighting, to do the train. Toby [Sedgwick] created the idea of the cart. That was all his work. [...] He was wonderfully sensitive to the needs of the play and not to do anything too self-conscious or too elaborate which could call attention to itself so that it would just be there and people would find it quite charming and attractive and it would not impinge, it would not stop the flow of the play as a piece of wonderful

writing. He succeeded in that in a way that I would not have dreamed possible really, when I set out on the journey" (telephone conversation with JK, 25 March 2008). The production displayed all the signs of the professional team in charge: self-assured and smooth-running, the different elements blending into a satisfying whole.

With a live audience to respond, the play emerges as even funnier than it did on the radio; yet its dark themes of death and dissolution still come through very strongly. *All that Fall* contains, of course, some of the most memorable lines in Beckett's drama: my own favorite, Mr. Tyler's "Ah in spite of all it is a blessed thing to be alive in such weather, and out of hospital," for example, or Mrs. Rooney's "Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel." But poor acting can too easily drain the life out of the dialogue or destroy its rhythms. There was none of that on display in the RADA production. All the actors were third-year students at the leading drama school in Britain, and some have already taken part in films or television plays or been snapped up by theatrical agents.

Gillian Bradbury (the only actor in the company from Ireland and with a nomination for Best Actress award in the Irish Film and Television Awards in 2005) was a highly credible Maddy Rooney, heavily padded, even down to her swollen ankles. She gave an excellent performance, funny yet moving, sensitive to the precision and wit of her language but capable also of delivering subtly the images of sadness, yet resilience that echo through the play. Gunnar Cauthery's Dan Rooney is a pocket James Joyce, his appearance clearly modeled on that of Beckett's friend, physically frail and, one feels, likely to have a heart attack at any moment, but verbally strong and competent. Michael Grady-Hall as Mr. Tyler is a perky bill-broker, precise and inventive with his moves and his mimes. Some of the smaller roles such as the station-master, Mr. Barrell, acted by John Hollingworth and Mr. Slocum (Greg Snowden), Jerry and Dolly (both acted by Lauren Crace), and Tommy (Rob Ostlere) were well played, as each one was given his or her own characteristic ways of walking as well as speaking. Miss Fitt, the Welsh actress Hedydd Dylan, was a delight with her lilting "distray" anticipation of May in *Footfalls*: "I suppose the truth is I am not there, Mrs Rooney, just not really there at all." Her light dancing movements as she enters express the tenuous hold that she has on the real world. This variety of ways of walking and moving again help to explain the production's success, as the actors put into effect the meticulous work that Toby Sedgwick has done with them.

I do have one or two minor quibbles. There seems little point in having vertical banners hanging down from the flies (with drawings on them based on Nobby Clark's photos of Foxrock). It adds little since these banners are hoisted as the play begins. More significantly, the visual inventiveness of the first part of the play throws into greater prominence the

slowness and wordiness of the second part when Mr. and Mrs. Rooney merely make their arduous way back home. It is difficult to see how this could be avoided and may be one of the problems envisaged by Beckett in staging the play.

Preceding *All that Fall* is a production of *Catastrophe* which also works well in the round. The empathy between the Protagonist (Michael Grady-Hall) and the small but sexy Assistant (Lauren Crace) to the Director (John Hollingworth) is well established by the care that she lavishes on his appearance and by her vigorous wiping with a rag of the chair on which the Director had been sitting so as to remove the contamination. It recalled a remark that Beckett made to me when I spoke to him about a moment in the Alan Schneider 1984 production when the Assistant blew away the smoke rings puffed out by the Director: "But she is not just blowing away the smoke!", commented Beckett with a knowing smile.

The end in the RADA production could have been even more powerfully dramatic had it been allowed a slightly longer pause and had more prolonged recorded applause before the applause is quelled by the Protagonist raising his head, saying (in Beckett's own words during the conversation just alluded to): "you bastards, you haven't finished me yet." Yet little is lost—by comparison with the travesty

of an ending which concluded the David Mamet film with John Gielgud and Harold Pinter. The production at RADA was an excellent one, following the stage directions to the letter and with some good

performances by the actors.

To return to *All that Fall*, does it have any future as a staged play? This, of course, depends entirely upon the attitude of the literary executor. In the past, both executors were merely honoring Beckett's own practice in refusing permission. As we have seen, he was certainly hostile to such a transfer, although at one point he did use the phrase that he had a "bee in [his] bonnet about mixing media." Moreover, when he agreed to a French film of *Tous ceux qui tombent* being made, it was because he thought it was to be directed by Alain Resnais, whose film, *Nuit et Brouillard*, he much admired: "I have not yet given the green light or this, but so admire Resnais that I probably shall" (SB letter to Alan Schneider, 27 April 1958). In other words, he behaved no differently with this play than with the other exceptions that he made when a director or an actor whose work he respected was involved in seeking permission for an adaptation. Had Resnais gone ahead and made a success of the transfer, Beckett's attitude to a staging in the theatre might well also have changed. We shall never know.

The situation has also evolved more than a little over the almost twenty years since Beckett's death. Adaptations of prose texts that at one time were relatively exceptional in being authorized by Beckett (e.g. *The Lost Ones* and *Company*) or have been permitted subsequently (e.g. *First Love*) have proliferated. Even with the stage plays changes have been made. As followers of the Beckett theatre scene will know, Peter Brook demonstrated recently that it is

"With a live audience to respond, the play emerges as even funnier than it did on the radio..."

possible to find new ways of presenting the shorter plays that respect their integrity without adhering strictly to the stage directions. Over the years I have seen some dreadful experimental productions (mostly not authorized) but also some of the most “faithful” but turgid productions that made me long for an imagination and a technical skill like Brook’s to be critically engaged with the plays. Another recent example of a successful imaginative rethinking of a television play for the stage was Atom Egoyan’s stunning version of *Eh Joe*, with Michael Gambon playing Joe. Beckett had already authorized, albeit reluctantly, a transfer of this to the stage several times during his lifetime. (For details of this and some earlier versions, see S.E. Gontarski’s review in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 15, nos. 1 and 2, Fall 2005/Spring 2006.)

Perhaps Gaskill and Sedgwick’s latest loving rethinking of *All that Fall* is a good example of how a way can be discovered of successfully effecting such a transfer from the medium of radio to the stage. A radio play will rarely be remade (or replayed in its original medium) for a new audience. The imaginative approach of Gaskill’s production seems to me to raise the interesting possibility of the radio drama being reconceived for a new medium and a new public. There are indications that the Beckett Estate is beginning to authorize such transfers from one medium to another, at least with certain directors and sometimes with certain added conditions. In Harvard University, for instance, to inaugurate the new theatre there, Robert Scanlan was allowed to direct a highly successful staging of *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, with newly commissioned music by the American composer, Martin Pearlman. There was also what was described as “a live-studio-recording” of ... *but the clouds...*, a convention used by Scanlan a decade ago in his Strasbourg “staging” of *Eh Joe*, *Ghost Trio*, and *Nacht*

und Träume. The over-all convention was that the audience was invited to a live recording of all three media plays in which Alvin Epstein played a central role.

As for myself, I should now certainly like to see another stage version of *All that Fall* with an outstanding director and with seasoned professional actors to compare it with the fine RADA production. The play is just too good a text (both too funny and too moving) to remain the preserve of the scholar.

--James Knowlson

CAST LIST

Catastrophe

Director: John Hollingworth

Assistant: Lauren Crace

Protagonist: Michael Grady-Hall

Luke: Rob Ostlere

All that Fall

Maddy: Jillian Bradbury

Christy: Greg Snowden

Mr Tyler: Michael Grady-Hall

Mr Slocum: Greg Snowden

Tommy: Rob Ostlere

Mr Barrell: John Hollingworth

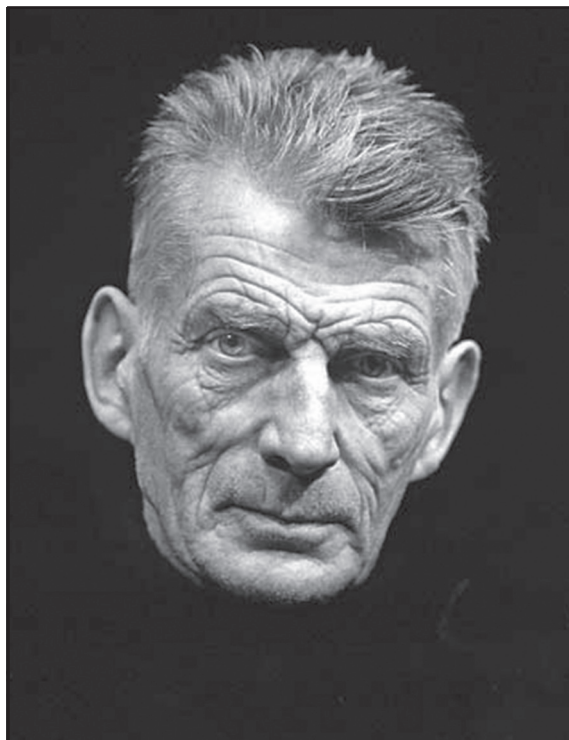
Miss Fitt: Hedydd Dylan

A Female Voice: Greg Snowden

Dolly: Lauren Crace

Mr Rooney: Gunnar Cauthery

Jerry: Lauren Crace



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). The Endpage contains the official homepage of the Samuel Beckett Society.

Previous issues of *The Beckett Circle*, dating from Spring 2003, are now available in their entirety on the website. Click on “The Beckett Circle” tab for PDF files of each issue.

Endgame at BAM

The unmistakable highlight of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's spring 2008 production of *Endgame* was undoubtedly to be found in the trashcans. Elaine Stritch as Nell and Alvin Epstein as Nagg seemed to have a fundamental understanding of the organizing aesthetic principle that nothing is funnier than unhappiness. They played precariously close to the invisible electric fence that separates hilarity and calamity in Beckett's texts. Epstein, who performed in the American premieres of both this play and *Waiting for Godot*, showed veteran stuff, wavering between utter devotion to chewing his cud and adoring his Nell. Stritch, the inimitable Broadway comedienne, was one moment racked with laughter and the next in the throes of anguished, silent tears. Nell was ready to be done with it, we all felt, and when Nagg yelled "Nell! Nell!" and we pronounce her dead, Epstein's delivery gave the phonetic pronunciation the distinct feeling that the knell he was shouting for was death's. The extended scene between the pair was funny and touching, the meatiest section of a generally strong production.

The production was skillfully directed by Andrei Belgrader, who shrewdly avoided the fatal pitfall of coming between the actor and Beckett's text. Belgrader also achieved a satisfying relative relation between laugh lines and apocalypse, also crucial in Beckett onstage—it surely is in the text. As Clov says of his kitchen: nice proportions. Amid the star-studded Beckett productions of New York City's spring and summer, BAM's *Endgame* certainly held its own. In addition to Stritch and Epstein, there was, of course, John Turturro as Hamm. A bit of a ham actor himself, as demonstrated perhaps most notably in his performance as the drop-dead disco bowling alley bully Jesus in the Coen Brothers' film *The Big Lebowski*, Turtur-

ro was most at home with this aspect of his role. Him to play. Turturro's Hamm played indeed, donning different voices for the characters that appear in his story about the man who, on his knees, pleads for Hamm to consent to take his child on either an extra-ordinarily bitter or glorious bright day. Turturro and Belgrader also orchestrated a sense of playfulness in the exchanges between Hamm and Clov, extending the idea of role-play to encompass this servant-master relationship. Turturro was, overall, solid and engaging, but there remained something about his performance that somehow seemed a bit young and green, and perhaps too vital.

Clov was played by Max Casella, best known to most Americans for his television appearances in *The Sopranos* and in the somewhat less critically acclaimed series *Doo-gie Howser, M.D.* Casella gives Clov his best shot. He was good, to be sure, but among such stellar colleagues, he was the weakest link and it showed. Belgrader and Casella certainly understood conceptually that extreme physical choices can be manipulated to communicate a specificity of character and mood, as in the "stiff, staggering walk" Beckett prescribes for Clov in the opening stage directions. But Casella, quite simply, was not up to the requirements of a material manifestation of Beckett's texts. The complete immersion of Stritch and Epstein showed us how it should be done, the result being that getting anything less was ultimately disappointing—just enough, as Hamm says to Clov, to keep you from dying.

The Harvey Theater has hosted two of the big names in Beckett lately as the home to both this production and the Fiona Shaw/Deborah Warner *Happy Days* extravaganza. Belgrader's production, however, made much more of the carefully cultivated deteriorating elegance made famous by Peter Brook. The terrific set, designed by Anita Stewart, was very much in tune with the theater architecture, which

could just barely be made out behind the playing area. The set itself was a simple curved wall, accompanied by a curved black floor to make a circular playing space perfect for Hamm's little turn round the world. On the wall could be seen the faint outline of grey, peeling bricks. The light, designed by Michael Chybowski, was cold and harsh. The feeling was decidedly grey. In the dim glow beyond the brightly lit wall, the fly system and back wall of theater were dimly discernible. The subtle yet palpable presence of these mechanisms of the theater was indescribably menacing. As the production wore on, I began to wonder whether the apocalyptic landscape Clov reports seeing out



Stritch and Epstein in *Endgame*. Photo courtesy of Richard Termine.



Turturro and Casella in *Endgame*. Photo courtesy of Richard Termine.

of the window is more terrifying if it is actually within in the theater itself. What is it, exactly that awaits the multitudes in transports of joy?

Aside from a few embellishments, Belgrader stayed quite faithful to the text. In one quite successful exception, Clov placed the three-legged dog with his tail and its environs facing Hamm, instead of its head as the stage directions describe. The context gave a funny, if slightly premeditated context to Hamm's suggestion that the dog might be begging him for a bone. In another departure from Beckett's stage directions, Clov, sick and tired of carrying out Hamm's whims, does not, in fact, open the window as Hamm requests, relying instead on self-generated sound effects to satisfy Hamm's demand. Belgrader's final and boldest departure from the stage directions came after Hamm's final speech. Following what should have been the final blackout, where Beckett writes "Curtain," the lights came on again to reveal Hamm and Clov still in their places. This addendum was rather muffled in its effect because the audience, predictably, had begun to applaud when the lights went down the first time, and the directorial artistic license seemed, as we say in Brooklyn, a bit ungepatchked (non-New Yorkers read: baroque.)

When Hamm put his handkerchief over his face at the close of the play, the image of the Abu Ghraib torture victims flashed instantly to my mind. Another of Belgrader's flourishes, or my own over-active imagination? Rereading the play, I also found an eerie ecological resonance in the zero landscape. What in God's name do we imagine, indeed? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like us? Tire gauge, anyone?

--Jessica Brater

Beckett Sessions at MLA 2008

Saturday, 27 December

80. **Novel(ist) Pairings: Beckett and Coetzee/Sebald/Naipaul**

5:15-6:30 p.m., Hilton San Francisco
Program arranged by the Samuel Beckett Society

Presiding: Daniel Katz, Univ. of Warwick

1. "The 'Idea Real' in Beckett and the Real in J. M. Coetzee," Anthony Uhlmann, Univ. of Western Sydney
2. "Remembering the Local in Beckett and Sebald," Robert Reginio, Alfred Univ.
3. "Beckett, Naipaul, and the Textuality of Boredom," Michael D'Arcy, Saint Francis Xavier Univ.

Sunday, 28 December

195. **Local and Global Beckett**

8:30-9:45 a.m., Hilton San Francisco
Program arranged by the Samuel Beckett Society

Presiding: Linda Ben-Zvi, Tel Aviv Univ.

"Dark Energy: An Aesthetic of Irrelevance," Herbert Blau, Univ. of Washington, Seattle

The Poetics of Vision: "Beckett and Visual Culture" at Warwick

On November 17th 2007, a one-day symposium was held at the University of Warwick to explore the theme of Beckett and Visual Culture. The event was conceived to examine the significance of the visual and visual arts to Beckett himself, but also to look at the influence that Beckett had and continues to have on artists, filmmakers and students of the visual in every context. To this end, scholars, artists, photographers, actors and directors came together in an interdisciplinary day which juxtaposed the critical and the creative.

The first session explored Beckett's influence on the contemporary artist. The symposium was conceived in part to accompany an exhibition of Dr. Bill Prosser's art works, inspired by Beckett's own doodles in the manuscript of his draft play "Human Wishes." Bill Prosser, currently engaged in a research project entitled "Beckett and the Phenomenology of Doodles:

A Visual and Theoretical Analysis" at the University of Reading, situated Beckett's own doodles in a history of doodling, exploring the aesthetic, political and psychological significance of the phenomenon in a wealth of different contexts, and suggesting some possible sources for Beckett's own images. Bill's work is informed by the phenomenology of perception, an understanding of moment-by-moment experience which does not look for causal relations—an approach absolutely appropriate to the unmotivated activity of doodling. A common concern with phenomenology and the role of bodily experience in philosophical thought underpinned the investigations made in the day as a whole.

The second talk in this session, by Sarah Blair, began with a screening of contemporary filmmaker Andrew Köting's film *Klipperty Klopp* (1984), a "post-punk piece of pagan sensibility." in the artist's own words, inspired by Beckett's work. The film has recently been purchased by the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and was shown at the Tate Gallery between 1990 and 1993. Sarah introduced this extraordinary film, which portrayed a Beckettian character, itinerant, unhoused, absorbed by pattern and permutation, issuing a Lucky-like muttering somewhere between prophecy and babble, and running manically in a perfect figure of eight on a bleak hillside. Sarah went on to speak about the idea, which the film had brought to mind, of the verbal doodle, incorporating a reading from an unpublished work by Marina Warner which considered Beckett's wordplay in this light.

In the second session, Professor Jonathan Bignell from the University of Reading screened Beckett's 1965 *Film*, and gave a lucid and revealing talk on the interpretations, aesthetics and history of the film and its conception. The phenomenology of vision is central to this work. Berkeley's influence on Beckett, as Jonathan noted, extends to his formulation of the idea that perceiving spirits have some notion of themselves as perceivers. *Film* takes this idea literally, and divides an individual, the Buster Keaton character, into perceiver and perceived. Being is seen to be irretrievably split, and Beckett substitutes the inescapability of God's perception with the inescapability of self-perception. Following this, Dr. Julian Garforth spoke about Beckett's interest in the German comedian Karl Valentin, whom Beckett saw perform during his travels in Germany in the 1930s, and whose appearance in the accompanying illustrations chimed uncannily with the images of Buster Keaton in *Film*. Valentin's physical appearance, clown-like visual comedy, and music-hall wordplay—both verbal doodle and quasi-philosophical wit—are all, as Julian showed, suggestive precursors of Beckett's own theatre.

The afternoon session began with a paper by Dr. Mark Nixon, the Director of the International Beckett Foundation at Reading. The paper explored Beckett's interest in fine art and his experiences of viewing paintings in Germany in the 1930s, and demonstrated how far Beckett's consideration of the act of looking itself influenced his own aesthetic practice. Mark argued that Beckett was highly

attuned to the relationship between perception and creativity in the 1930s, formulating a poetics of vision which explored the act and experience of seeing itself. Beckett's comments on the painter Karl Ballmer's *Kopf in Rot* (1930-31), for example, suggest that such a painting has a certain concreteness rooted in the fact that the optical experience of the viewer subsumes the ability of the painting to communicate, and provides both "motive" and "content" for the work of art. The eye provided for Beckett a potent metaphor for poetic creation at this time, the eyelid needing to close to the glare of the outer world in order to explore fully the unseen world of the mind.

Following Mark's talk, Ulrika Maude from the University of Durham examined Beckett's late prose and television work in connection with the images of the body, at once more objective and more virtualised and fragmented, that were becoming available in Beckett's lifetime through new medical imaging technologies. Maude's paper shed new light on the significance of the concept of the prosthesis to Beckett's work, and also explored the phenomenology of seeing one's own body, a process that renders problematic the position of both subject and object. The image of the eye and eyelid, so significant in the iconography of *Film*, as demonstrated by Jonathan Bignell, and the poetics of Beckett's early work, as Mark Nixon showed, is likewise central to the phenomenological reading of the body that

Ulrika proposes in her work.

To conclude the academic business, the speakers came together with two other Beckett scholars, Dr. Daniel Katz from the University of Warwick and Dr. Matthew Feldman from the University of Northampton, in a lively panel discussion on "Beckett and Phenomenology." Chaired by Liz Barry, the discussion introduced the forthcoming collection on this topic edited by Matthew Feldman and Ulrika Maude, and explored both the possible influences on Beckett from the phenomenological tradition, and the usefulness to contemporary scholarship of this philosophical approach to interpreting Beckett's work. The panel touched on Beckett's awareness of thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Jean Beaufret and others working in the phenomenological tradition, and discussed the dramatization of certain phenomenological themes in Beckett's own writing, expanding on the suggestions in this direction in the papers already heard by Prosser, Bignell, Nixon and Maude about the centrality of consciousness, lived experience and the body to Beckett's philosophical and aesthetic explorations.

After the last academic session of the day, the *Fail Better* theatre company performed two little-seen Beckett plays, *Rough for Theatre II* (c.1960) and *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), and concluded the day's proceedings with a short talk by the director, Jonathan Heron, and a discussion with the audience about their interpretation of these works, and the challenges they offer to the sight, hearing and understanding of the audience.

--Elizabeth Barry

Endgame at Edinburgh's Theatre Workshop

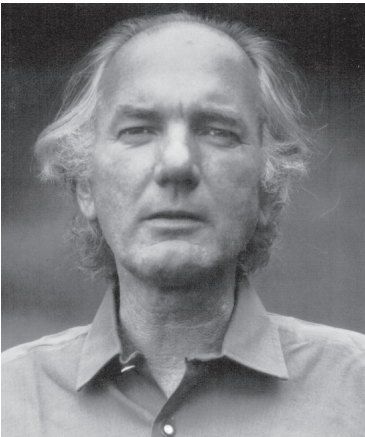
Theatre Workshop was founded in the 1970s and reached its peak under the artistic direction of Andy Arnold in the 1980s. Its focus has primarily been on theatre in the community (much like the original 7:84 company) and it has often profiled actors with disabilities. In this respect, the company has forged new pathways for Scottish Theatre. Theatre Workshop's version of *Endgame* has had a mixed reception: certainly, it is an imaginative and visually innovative production but there are some significant departures from Beckett's script. The futuristic set, designed in collaboration with Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre, and the dissonant soundtrack form a suitably apocalyptic backdrop for the performance. The main centre piece is Hamm's cage (one hesitates to say chair or throne). This construction is fitted with bell and clapper (used in place of the whistle specified in Beckett's script) and other random items, including a rather incongruous Eeyor cuddly toy. Over the course of the performance, the cage forms the climbing frame for an unusually active Hamm. Hamm is played by Nabil Shaban, an accomplished actor whose countenance I can never forget after witnessing his performance of a slug-like being called the Sil in an early episode of *Dr Who*.

At the outset (after Clov has removed the cloth from the central set piece) Hamm's coiled up body can be seen suspended in a ball on the platform of his cage. In many respects, this visual trick in which the body is reduced to a tiny and scarcely moving bundle offers precisely that tension between body and object which intellectuals (such as Adorno) have identified in Beckett's play. When Hamm springs into life he becomes quite another matter and, throughout the production, the melodramatic, bawdy and spiteful sides of the character are emphasised. At various points, Shaban writhes, points his feet, delivers lewd pelvic thrusts, recoils and spits his lines like a snake. Perhaps his Learish version of Hamm would have been more suited to a larger theatre, as the venue in Banchory forms a rather cramped and claustrophobic space for such an Olympian performance. The quieter, more reflective (and self reflexive) aspects of the character do not come across and some of Beckett's drier jokes tend to fall flat. In short, there is plenty of fire here but not much in the way of ashes.

A further, and in some respects ingenious, departure from the script is the wheelchair-bound Clov, played by Garry Robson. Robson gives an understated world-weary version of the character in the first half of the play, but his performance is marred towards the end by needless staginess. The despairing scream prior to the final speech ("Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that...") scarcely seems necessary. Furthermore, although the wheelchair opens up some interesting possibilities in representing the character, there are some moments which seem forced, as when Clov (in order to circumvent obvious discontinuities with the script) pretends to the blind Hamm that he can walk by striking the floor with an artificial leg. Nagg and Nell, played by Raymond Short and Dolina Maclen-

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nan (actor and musician in the original 7:84 company), are placed in metal cages as opposed to the traditional dustbins. Together they form a rather droll Scottish double act (this went down well with some members of the audience, and one could detect a certain degree of camaraderie when MacLennan delivered her lines). An element of pantomime and the repartee of the music hall entertainer is certainly latent in the dialogue between these "accursed progenitors," but a more muted performance might have brought out the play's tonal resonances more effectively (the significance of Nell's final words, for instance, is lost).

In the programme notes to the production, director Robert Rae states that he intends to move away from academic and highbrow interpretations of Beckett's work and seeks to provide a clear and accessible version of the play. He also makes some commentary on the play's social resonance and its relationship to the experience of mass warfare. However, the overall effect of the performance on this particular night (9 Feb. 2008) was one of clutter, and the lines were frequently mumbled, delivered in shouts or drowned out by the musical soundtrack. Beckett himself knew what would make this play work when directing

(as even a cursory scan of the *Theatrical Notebooks* demonstrates), and he once referred to *Endgame* as a cantata for two voices. He would have abhorred the background music in this production because it would have distracted from the verbal kinetics latent in the play.

There is a case, as several recent productions have proved, for moving Beckett's theatrical works into new territory (and not just in the theatre, as Anthony Minghella's rendering of *Play* in the *Beckett on Film* sequence effectively demonstrates). In this respect, Theatre Workshop's *Endgame* can be seen as an intriguing, if not entirely successful, experiment. The kinetic sculptures were also, in themselves, visually arresting. Alongside Hamm's cage, other items like the monstrously sized periscope that Clov uses to gain a view from both windows of the shelter add a zany and comic flavour to the play. However, I sensed that, beneath all the paraphernalia, the production seems to have disregarded the key dimension to Beckett's theatre, that less is more. Not what I would have expected from a company of this pedigree and standing. That said, this was certainly an unusual and at times diverting piece of theatre, although it wasn't quite Beckett.

--Paul Shanks

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This will be the last issue of the *Beckett Circle* during my presidency. As of 1 January, Richard Begam takes over as head of the Samuel Beckett Society for the next two years. His Board members include Anthony Uhlmann and Daniel Katz. I know under their leadership, the society will be in good hands.

During the past two years, the society has continued to grow. Many of our new members are students, a good sign. Most longtime members responded the call for dues renewal. We will be writing to those who did not to encourage them to keep their membership active.

After the worldwide celebrations of 2006, it would be natural to expect a slackening off of Beckett activities in the past two years, but that hasn't happened. On the contrary, major theatre companies are mounting new productions, several of which are reviewed in this issue; and those companies that in 2006 staged Beckett works, such as the Gate Theatre, are taking those productions abroad with new casts.

We have also reactivated our website, at the University of Antwerp (see advertisement in this issue) under the supervision of Dirk Van Hulle, whom I want to thank for his fine work. It is the main internet source for the society. If you have announcements of Beckett activities, send them to Dirk for posting: dirk.vanhulle@ua.ac.be. You can Google the Samuel Beckett Society and the website will come up or use the address http://www.ua.ac.be/main.aspx?c=*SBECKETT&n=60655

One of the things we will be discussing at our annual board meeting, which is held at the MLA convention, is our method for collecting dues. For the past four years, we have used a US bank that did not take euros or other currencies for payment. This has put a great burden on our many international members. We are aware of this situation and hope to find a bank that will allow more flexibility. We'll keep you posted.

If any of you have issues concerning the Society or the newsletter that you wish the board to consider, please send them to me by 1 December, and I will share them with the board members.

It has been an honor serving as president, and I thank you for your input and your continued support of the society.

Linda Ben-Zvi

BOOK REVIEWS

Minako Okamuro, Naoya Mori, Bruno Clement, Sjef Houppermans, Angela Moorjani, Anthony Uhlmann, eds. *Borderless Beckett/Beckett Sans Frontieres (Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui 19)*. Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2008. 468pp. \$107.

The usual timetable for academic publishing means that the after-effects of 2006—a year marked by conferences, colloquia, and celebratory events—are still being felt in Beckett Studies. Perhaps, when we look back on the year (and when all of the papers currently in press or in preparation are finally published), the main benefit of 2006 is that it gave those involved in the study of Beckett the chance to engage, however marginally, in a year-long discussion and re-evaluation of the work. This collection, from the “Borderless Beckett” conference in Wasada University in Tokyo, marks not only the centenary of Beckett’s birth, but also the fiftieth anniversary of the first appearance of Beckett’s work in Japan. The essays here provide a very good cross section of the discussions taking place in various locations around the world during the year. Indeed, not only does this collection mirror those discussions, it also demonstrates that this year-long conversation was conducted at all levels of Beckett studies, from the most established names in the discipline, to those just beginning their careers.

A key feature of this conversation is that participants have used the opportunity to re-examine not only Beckett’s work but the state of Beckett Studies. Indeed, this collection contains at least one significant re-evaluation, and from the other essays we can discern broad trends in the development of Beckett studies such as the further downplaying of overtly post-modern theorisation; the firm entrenching of Badiou as a touchstone for contemporary Beckettian analysis; and the continued significance of Deleuze, Blanchot, Bataille and discourses drawn from psychoanalysis to the discipline. Moreover, the links between Beckett and the times in which he worked is mulled over in a number of essays while others consider the more marginal sections of the *oeuvre*. It is good to see an essay devoted to Beckett’s mime plays, for example. All in all, this is a representative sample of the year, and that is not intended as faintly dismissive praise; there is much that is stimulating and intriguing here.

Arguably the most important essay is Steven Connor’s “‘On such and such a day... In such a world’: Beckett’s radical finitude.” The very presence of the word finitude in

“This is far removed from the infinite play of Connor’s previous work ... the essay deserves a significant place in Beckett Studies.”

the title should be enough to set Beckett scholars on their guard. Connor, after all, is known mainly as the author of *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (1988), which has become a key point of reference for those examining the infinite regressions and aporias in the Beckettian text. This essay, though, is a recantation, and at points almost a *mea culpa*: what marks out Beckett’s work for Connor now is its relation to the finite, to an ending which is always present but which can never be grasped. It is simply there, refusing all efforts to reconcile itself to a conscious understanding. Using Jean-Luc Nancy’s *A Finite Thought*, Connor argues that the event (to use Badiou’s term) occurs in Beckett’s work in what might be thought of as a Poissin distribution, in which moments of significance do

not link with each other to suggest the possibility of new meanings.

Rather, they stand alone, separate from each other, each one gesturing toward an end that can never be imagined. This is far removed from the infinite play of Connor’s previous work and for that, as well as for the

appositeness and elegance of Connor’s argument, the essay deserves a significant place in Beckett Studies.

Other essays engage with and attempt to reframe what might be termed the “eternal questions” of Beckett studies: in Bruno Clement’s “Mais quelle est cette vox?,” the relation between Beckett’s work and philosophical discourse is readdressed via Blanchot. In Angela Moorjani’s interesting “Genesis, child’s play and the gaze of silence: Samuel Beckett and Paul Klee,” the relation between Beckett and the art of his time is re-examined. The essay does not simply itemize similarities between Beckett and Klee, but links both of their artistic projects to a modernist interest in the child’s perception of the world. Chris Ackerley re-addresses the question of translation in Beckett, and in particular the reworking of puns. He notes that the process of translating puns works to a logic of equivalence and mismatching, and to texts which are both equal to and independent of their sources. S.E. Gontarski looks at interrupted endings which constitute the structure of *Endgame* and, perhaps most interestingly, Mary Bryden returns to one of the points of origin for Beckett Studies: re-examining the clown, this time via the novels of Heinrich Boll, a writer Beckett admired.

Other papers seek to make new connections: Ulrika Maude draws parallels between the TV plays and recent advances in modern medicine—in particular, the technique of digital scanning. Masaki Kondo discerns in *Ill Seen Ill Said* a narrative process akin to the Noh concept of *ma*—a pause in performance which connotes action rather than stillness. Jonathan Tadashi Naito and Manako Ono examine, in their respective essays, the mime plays of the 1950s, Naito linking them to Beckett’s later work and Ono using

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them to reconfigure another well worn concept, that of the Absurd. Shane Weller establishes, to my mind convincingly, a political and ethical discourse founded on Beckett's portrayal of animals; Yoshiki Tajiri contributes a carefully argued discussion of Beckett's influence on J.M. Coetzee.

That some essays are less successful is, perhaps, a given in collections as large as this. I am unconvinced by the parallels Futoshi Sakauchi draws between *Not I* and recent portrayals of the sufferings of Irish women under Catholicism. Beckett's play memorably conveys pain and dislocation; but the argument Sakauchi makes tells me more about a possible (and entirely legitimate) co-option of the text than it does about the text itself. Similarly, there is a sense of inevitability about Gabriela Garcia Hubbard's "'Sa naissance fut sa perte et la perte son aporie': Heidegger/Beckett/ Derrida." The essay is well constructed, but I can't escape the thought that we have been here before, more than once. Perhaps it is time to leave discussions of the aporia in Beckett to the side, if only for a little while.

However, the collection contains far more successful than unsuccessful discussions, and is worth a close examination, if for Connor's essay alone. The volume is prefaced by Coetzee's intriguing meditation, entitled "Eight ways of looking at Samuel Beckett." I must admit that the title occasioned a rueful smile (if only there were eight ways...); but the collection itself is a useful addition to the multivalent field of Beckett studies, and a sign of its robust health.

--David Pattie

Graley Herren. *Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 228pp. \$65.

Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television is the first book to focus primarily on Beckett's screen-plays—a fact that Herren boldly acknowledges in his introduction when thoroughly mapping out the scholarship available on Beckett's work for the large and small screen. While there are numerous articles that deal with Beckett's film and teleplays (the most notable being Gilles Deleuze's "The Exhausted"—a work that Herren often cites), few since Clas Zilliacus in *Beckett and Broadcasting* (1976) have studied the media plays in great length. This, Herren argues, is in part due to the inaccessibility of the teleplays and film. They are rarely screened even at Beckett conferences. Unlike the original BBC radio productions which have been transferred to CD and made available in 2006, none of the original BBC or SDR teleplays have been available for purchase. Despite this, Herren's study proves valuable to more than just those Beckett scholars haunted by his screen images; Herren's approach—tracing the intratextual and intertextual references in the screen images—situates the teleplays and film more fully than before into the Beckett canon. What is more, his descriptions of

the screen-plays are so vivid that even those who have not seen them will gain a better appreciation of these obscure works. Merely reading the scripts, as Herren points out, is problematic because for Beckett they served as blueprints; the performances often veered from the page.

Herren begins by asserting that Beckett heeded Ezra Pound's call to "make it new" by "making it old anew" (1). This propels Herren into a discussion of television as a "memory machine." For Beckett, television offered new opportunities to explore the old—memories of artistic and cultural pasts. Drawing on Beckett's reading of Arthur Schopenhauer, Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, his passion for painting, music and poetry, Herren undertakes a monumental journey in the chapters that follow. Chronologically, Herren explores the intratextual and intertextual shades on screen, ultimately proving that the term "telegy" works best to describe Beckett's tendency towards a modern elegiac form. This counter-tradition "is fought on the psychological terrain of mourning"; rather than offering consolation, the wounds of loss remain open (21). But Herren does more than this; he also imparts with useful knowledge about Beckett's interest and frustration in technology. He reveals that with each project, Beckett explored new techniques in order to offer a decomposition of the past to recompose it (96-97), *making it old anew*.

Quadrat I + II poses, for Herren, a problem which he readily acknowledges. Although in this "crazy TV piece for Stuttgart" (123) shades are still present on screen in the form of four shrouded figures, and although the teleplay follows roughly the same pattern as his previous work for the medium does in that it sets up a routine in its "Pre-action" section (*Quadrat I*) that is then decomposed and rearranged in the "Action" section (*Quadrat II*), ultimately *Quadrat I + II* lacks "the crucible of conflict where the previous teleplays developed their formal and narrative tensions" (125). These tensions are defined by Beckett's protagonists' need or desire to remember women from their pasts. Here, however, there is no memory, no ghost that needs to be conjured up in this failed project of Beckett's (he was never completely satisfied with the product and at least once tried to back out of it [123]). Herren goes on to outline with great humor some of the best scholarship on *Quadrat I + II*. Ultimately, what he reveals in this chapter are two crucial points: firstly, that when faced with the ineffable, even Beckett scholars are guilty of contextualizing the mystery, whether it is by turning to Dante, *Macbeth*, or the *Teletubbies*. Secondly, drawing on Beckett and Georges Duthuit's exchange originally published in the December 1949 issue of *transition*, Herren suggests that perhaps *Quadrat I + II* comes closest to Beckett's thoughts on the obligation of the modern artist to express. Herren explains that even though "the quadrangular canvas should remain blank, unstained by expression, purely and perfectly ineffable," Beckett, the artist, "cannot resist the urge to eff the canvas—with color no less" (138).

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Herren's last chapter explores two adaptations of Beckett's stage plays—Marin Karmitz's 1966 French film of *Comédie* and the 1985 SDR teleplay *Was Wo*—revealing the similarities in the screen images despite the two decades that separate them. Here Herren stresses the importance of collaboration; for Beckett collaborating and sharing ideas were essential to creative stage and screen projects. Too often, Herren explains, Beckett is depicted as an artist who worked alone and insisted on a very specific and finalized artistic vision. Herren reveals a different Beckett—a writer who was willing to experiment, who was willing to move past the page, and most importantly, who was willing to allow others to experiment with his texts. Herren closes with a discussion of the *Beckett on Film* debate, focusing his lens on Anthony Minghella's *Play*. While many scholars complained that the project did not remain faithful to Beckett's vision, Herren defends Minghella, stating that "it is a valid film adaptation that responds thoughtfully to the challenges posed by the original piece" (194) and warns that the "greatest barrier to future adaptations of Minghella's caliber is overprotection from Beckett's self-appointed defenders, in the form of zealous critics and litigious estate agents" (195). We must, this study reminds us, be more open as Beckett was to *making it old anew*.

--Katherine Weiss

Gesa Schubert. *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007 (Anglistik / Amerikanistik, vol. 28). IX, 265pp. € 29.90.

This study, which arose from a doctoral thesis at the Free University Berlin, contributes to the ongoing debate about Beckett's aesthetics which has been conducted with some vigour in the past decade or so. By focussing on the critical writings Beckett produced over a period of roughly 40 years, Schubert wishes to reconstruct the development of his aesthetics. Her approach consists essentially of a close reading of those texts, and this enables her to achieve many of her aims. Beckett's notion that "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail" (from his essay on Bram van Velde) is of course a well-known *topos* in Beckett Studies, but Schubert adds to this knowledge by demonstrating how such a pessimistic notion is the result of continuous process of aesthetic reflection, and that it emerged some time in the mid-1940s largely out of unresolved internal contradictions in Beckett's theorising (pp.2-5).

The book is divided into two parts. In Part One, which makes up more than three quarters of the study, Schubert discusses the early theoretical writings and statements (till 1938), including "Dante...Bruno. Vico..Joyce" and

"Proust," before tackling the late theoretical texts (1945-66), which are mainly the van Velde essay, "Peintres de l'Empêchement" and "Three Dialogues." But although Schubert states early on that she is not interested in contextualising Beckett's ideas in the history of aesthetics, she does so in her extended discussion of the Proust essay. Perhaps realising the limitations of her approach to read Beckett's aesthetics exclusively on his own terms, Schubert reads Beckett's references to Schopenhauer in the Proust essay as pointing towards an artistic/literary practice which is at once "perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable" (p.106). Nevertheless, what may appear as a methodological weakness is more than balanced by her perceptive readings. Schubert never constructs Beckett's critical writings as simple vehicles for ideas, and instead works out what Ruby Cohn has called Beckett's "lyrics of criticism," whereby literary strategies and deliberate ambiguity more often than not work to subvert any cohesive argument and militate against unambiguous discourse. And while Schubert is very good at tracking the twists and turns of Beckett's critical positions, at times she tends to obscure the overall focus of her own argument. This part also suffers somewhat from an uneven balancing (the "Proust" essay, for example, takes up 60 of the first part's 180 or so pages) and the explanation for Beckett's shift from literary criticism to the visual arts is buried beneath the detailed discussion of individual texts. That said, Schubert clearly demarcates the turning point in Beckett's thinking. Anti-mimetic from the start, his early theory considers art to be a privileged practice to give "form" to the formlessness, to resolve the problems faced by a subject confronted with the modern world. But from the 1940s, art became part of the problem and as a result Beckett began to embrace the notion of failure. Schubert explains this shift as the result an increasing gulf between Beckett's aesthetic outlook and his own literary writing, aided by an increasingly sceptical attitude towards language (pp.192-9). Again, the limitations of Schubert's "internal" approach become apparent here. She demonstrates just how Beckett was able to free himself from an impasse that was beginning to have repercussions for his own writings, but this is at the expense of other factors, such as Beckett's experiences during World War II.

Most studies of Beckett's aesthetics seek in some way to relate their findings to his literary writings, and Schubert is no exception. In the second part of her study, she seeks to identify the significance of those aesthetic ideas for Beckett's fiction, with a very brief "excursus" devoted to the plays. Again, Beckett's output is divided into early fiction from "Assumption" to *Murphy*, and late fictions, by which Schubert chiefly means the trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable*. Schubert raises a number of fair points, but the discussion is far too brief to add anything new, and does little to test the tacit assumption that there is a one-to-one correlation between theoretical and literary

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writings. In the end, then, Schubert seems largely content to confirm that hypothesis and adds (without a noticeable sense of irony) that in his later fiction, Beckett largely succeeds in implementing the aesthetics of failure (p.240). This is a slightly mechanical exercise and a disappointing end to an otherwise useful and reliable guide to Beckett's aesthetic theories and the internal logic of their development. However, in the light of Schubert's reluctance to contextualise and historicise Beckett's ideas, this reader at least is left with the impression that in this case, more would have been more.

-- Andreas Kramer

Anthony Barnett. *Listening for Henry Crowder: A Monograph on His Almost Lost Music with the Poems and Music of Henry-Music*. Lewes, East Sussex: Allardyce, Barnett, 2007. 128pp plus 29 track CD. £36; €55; US\$66

Nancy Cunard, whose *Hours Press* published *Whoroscope* in 1930, remained a lifelong friend of Beckett's. His prose-poem, "Text," appeared in the same issue of the *New Review* as her furious attack on her mother, "Black Man and White Ladyship." He discussed her poem *Parallax* in an early letter to MacGreevy (July 1930: "Perhaps its very good") and asked Cunard if she had a spare copy as late as November 1958, after his had been lost. She persuaded him to translate a lot of material, much of which he found uncongenial, for the *Negro* anthology, which she dedicated to Crowder. Crowder though, until now, has been a shadowy figure, remembered, if at all, for his liaison with Cunard and his setting of Beckett's poem "From the Only Poet to a Shining Whore" which, as Beckett told MacGreevy, Henry found "vey, vey bootiful & vey vey fine in-deed."

Anthony Barnett is a jazz musician and researcher, poet and translator (e.g. of Roger Giroux in Paul Auster's *Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry*) as well as a publisher—his *Nothing Doing in London* published Paul Joyce's *The Goad*, a treatment of Beckett's *Act Without Words II* in 1966. He explains, with unnecessary modesty, that *Listening for Henry Crowder* is neither a biography nor a critical work, but is intended "to set the record straight in assembling some of the factual detail of an unusual personality of the Jazz Age." And so he does, but with a good deal more besides. Barnett establishes that Crowder was born in 1890 in Gainesville Georgia. By the age of twenty he was working as a musician. After a year at Atlanta University he made his way first to Washington and then to Chicago, leading orchestras in both towns. Between August and December 1926 he recorded a series of piano rolls which are included on the CD. Crowder fell out with the magement at the Chicago venue where he played and took to the road with Jelly Roll Morton, before joining

Eddie South and his Alabamians. It is a great shame that there are no recordings of Crowder with Jelly Roll, but the CD does include ten tracks with South, on one of which. "My Ohio Home," Crowder takes a superb piano solo. It was with the Alabamians that Crowder first came to Paris. Barnett does a very good job of portraying the life of a black musician in Europe in the jazz age and of assembling the reactions of white exiles in Paris. Cunard's enthusiasm, which leads to her seven year relationship with Crowder is captured in her own words: "Enchanting people, all four, whom we went to hear again and again and often talked with Edie, 'the dark angel of the violin,' Mike the guitarist, Henry at the piano and Romie at the drums . . . Bless them all . . ." Richard Aldington was "thrilled" to meet Henry because "he turned out to be one of Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers."

Barnett tells the story of the publication of *Henry-Music* in some detail and has worked assiduously, but in vain, to track down a copy of the recording of "From the Only Poet to a Shining Whore." The song was certainly scheduled to be recorded but may never have been issued. However, Barnett did find a copy of the Sonabel recording of Cunard's "Memory Blues," issued under the title "Boeuf sur le toit" with "St Louis Blues" on the B-side. These are both included on the CD and are truly wonderful. "Boeuf sur le toit," a solemn, slow blues sung in Crowder's rich lower register, holds its own against Crowder's higher-pitched, up-beat account of the standard which is enlivened by a couple of spoken lines towards the end ("I love that man, yes I love him, of course I love him, just like a schoolboy loves his pie!"). It closes with a playful "dawgone." Barnett reproduces *Henry-Music* in facsimile, but the reader is not obliged to pick out the tunes, since the CD includes a new recording of all the *Henry-Music* songs performed by Allan Harris. The timbre of Harris's voice is more velvety than Crowder's, more jazz-café than *bateau-ivre*, but in his fine performance, Crowder's skill as a composer is apparent. The piano accompaniment, which draws on the art-song as well as the blues tradition, gives *Henry-Music* a surprising unity as a collection. Cunard's *Equatorial Way*, brings to mind Barnett's quote from Henry: "But I ain't African. I'm American." The poems by Aldington, Lowenfels and Acton also, surprisingly, work as songs, while Crowder writes the music for "From the Only Poet" as though he knows what the words mean. Barnett quotes Charles Olson who met Crowder visiting Pound in St Elizabeth's after the war: "Says Henry: Ah been readin' Mr Pound's Cantos. And Ah don't know why I read em, cause I don't understand 'em. Snobbism, I guess" (Crowder appears in Pound's *Canto LXXXIV*). As Barnett says of *Henry-Music*: "Each poem has its reason. What is evident is that *Henry-Music* is not quirky but remarkable."

I have dwelt at length on the strong Beckett interest, but this short book is a cornucopia. Barnett gives an en-

BOOK REVIEWS

gaging account of Crowder after Cunard, including his internment in a labour camp in Germany during the war and his troubled later years. He reprints a number of fascinating documents. As well as Crowder's account of the Crescendo Club in Washington (1920), his contributions to *Negro* and Eddie South's report on the reception of his Alabamians in Europe in the late twenties, there are newspaper articles on the return of Crowder, Freddy Johnson and the wrestler Reginald Siki to the U.S.A. and of their experiences in the Nazi interment camps. The book includes a complete discography and a chronological, annotated bibliography. It is lavishly illustrated with private photographs, publicity stills, piano roll and disk labels and artworks, including Man Ray's photomontages for the Hours Press, Dufy and Cocteau's illustrations for the *Boeuf sur le Toit* and drawings by inmates of the Nazi detention camps (Josef Nassy's sketch of Freddy Johnson at the piano is superb). I cannot imagine anyone who has an interest in Beckett's poems or his development in the 1930s not enjoying this book. The twenty-nine track CD is a considerable bonus.

--Seán Lawlor

New and Forthcoming

- Boulter, Jonathan. *Samuel Beckett: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Guides for the Perplexed). London: Continuum, 2008. ISBN: 978-0826481955
- Branigan, Kevin. *Radio Beckett: Musicality in the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009. ISBN: 9783039113712.
- Feldman, Matthew and Mark Nixon. *International Reception of Samuel Beckett* (Continuum Reception Studies). London: Continuum, 2009. ISBN: 978-0826495815
- Maude, Ulrika. *Beckett, Technology and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780521515375.
- Murray, Christopher. *Samuel Beckett: Playwright & Poet*. London: Pegasus, 2009. ISBN: 978-1605980027.
- Van Hulle, Dirk. *Stirrings Still / Soubresauts: Comment Dire / What Is the Word* (Samuel Beckett's Bilingual Works). Brepols, 2008. ISBN: 978-2503516448

The Beckett Circle Le Cercle de Beckett

ISSN 0732-224

Editor-in-Chief: Graley Herren
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All members of the Samuel Beckett Society are encouraged to submit items of interest for publication in *The Beckett Circle*. **If possible, submissions should be emailed in Word or Rich Text Format.** Please send all essays, theater reviews, letters to the editor, inquiries about advertising rates, and information on special events to:

Graley Herren
Department of English
Xavier University
3800 Victory Parkway
Cincinnati, Ohio 45207-4446
herren@xavier.edu

Inquiries concerning book reviews should be sent to:

Derval Tubridy
Department of English & Comparative Literature
Goldsmith College
London, SE 14 6 NW
England
d.tubridy@gold.ac.uk

Please note that all materials for the Fall issue must be received by September 1, for the Spring issue by March 1.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Barry is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Warwick. Her book *Beckett and Authority: The Uses of Cliche* was published by Palgrave in 2006. She has published widely on Beckett, and has also written on Jean Genet, Sarah Kane and Roy Williams. She is guest editor of a forthcoming edition of the *Journal of Beckett Studies* on "Beckett, Language and the Mind."

Jessica Brater is a student in the Theatre Studies Ph.D. program at the CUNY Graduate Center. She is also the founding Artistic Director of Polybe + Seats, a Brooklyn-based experimental theater company, and the Theatre Administrator at Barnard College, where she received her B.A.

Daina Giesler is a Theatre Director and is currently Artistic Director of Oswego Playhouse in Illinois and previously was the Artistic Director for Theatre Charlotte in North Carolina. She has taught theatre at the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois, Triton College in River Grove, Illinois, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

James Knowlson is Emeritus Professor of French at the University of Reading. A friend of Samuel Beckett for almost twenty years, he wrote his authorized biography, *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett* which won the George Freedley Memorial Award in the USA in 1996 and the Southern Arts Non-Fiction Prize in the UK. He has also published several books, editions, and articles on Beckett, as well as numerous essays on modern European drama. His latest book in 2006 was *Beckett Remembering—Remembering Beckett* (with Elizabeth Knowlson).

Andreas Kramer is Reader in German at Goldsmiths, University of London. His research interests focus on twentieth-century German and Austrian writing, the avant-garde especially Dada and Expressionism. He is author of *Regionalismus und Moderne: Studien zur deutschen Literatur 1900-1933* (Berlin: Weidler, 2006) and *A Bibliography of the Primary Works of Yvan Goll*, with Robert Vilain (Oxford: P. Lang, 2006)

Seán Lawlor is a PhD student at the University of Reading researching Samuel Beckett's early poems.

Lois Oppenheim is a Professor of French and Chair of the Modern Languages and Literatures department at Montclair State University. She has authored or edited ten books, including *A Curious Intimacy: Art and Neuro-Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2005) and *The Painted World: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue With Art* (The University of Michigan Press, 2000). Dr. Oppenheim is a past president of the Samuel Beckett Society. She also serves on the Board of Directors of The Philoctetes Center for the Multidisciplinary Study of Imagination in New York, is Scholar Associate at New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and is Honorary Member at William Alanson White Institute for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy.

David Pattie is Reader in Drama at the University of Chester. He has published on Samuel Beckett (*The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett*, Routledge 2000) as well as chapters and articles on modern British drama, Scottish theatre, popular performance styles, and performance theory.

Rossana Sebellin currently works as researcher at the University of Rome "Tor Vergata". She has a Ph.D. from the University of Urbino "Carlo Bo," with a dissertation on Beckett's self-translation analysing the author's manuscripts of *Play* and *Not I* (and their French versions). She has published a study of Beckett's *Eleutheria* and several articles on Beckett and on Modernism.

Paul Shanks is currently a research fellow at the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at Aberdeen. He has published articles on the Glasgow writer James Kelman and is interested in literary and cultural overlaps in twentieth-century Irish, Scottish and European writing. He is currently preparing a monograph introduction to Beckett as part of the *Aberdeen Introductions to Irish and Scottish Culture* series (forthcoming 2010).

Katherine Weiss is Assistant Professor at East Tennessee State University. Her dissertation from the University of Reading was called 'Modernization and Mechanization: Technology in the Works of Samuel Beckett.' She has published a number of articles and chapters on Beckett's and Sam Shepard's theatre.

CURRENT & UPCOMING EVENTS

Call for Papers

33RD ANNUAL COMPARATIVE DRAMA CONFERENCE

March 26-28, 2009 in Los Angeles, California
Submission Deadline: December 11, 2008

Papers reporting on new research and development in any aspect of drama are invited for the **33rd Comparative Drama Conference** that will take place in Los Angeles, **March 26–28, 2009**. Papers may be comparative across nationalities, periods and disciplines; and may deal with any issue in dramatic literature, criticism, theory, and performance, or any method of historiography, translation, or production. Papers should be 15 minutes in length and should be accessible to a multi-disciplinary audience. Scholars and artists in all languages and literatures are invited to **email a 250 word abstract** (with paper title, author's name, institutional affiliation, and postal address at top left) to conference director Kevin Wetmore at compdram@lmu.edu by **December 11, 2008**.

Abstracts will be printed in the conference program, and presenters may submit papers for publication in the peer-reviewed book series *Text & Presentation*, published by McFarland.

Inquiries about Beckett sessions at the conference should be directed to board member Graley Herren at herren@xavier.edu

Call for Papers for the Zero issue of Limit(e) Beckett

What demarcates one language from another?
How are we to conceive of and cross over such limits?

Born of the need to draw together two adjacent yet relatively disconnected ways of thinking, *Limit(e) Beckett* aims to break down the barriers between the anglophone and francophone critical universes. On the example of a *limit*, from the Latin

limes, a borderline between fields and a passageway, our aim is to open a space for dialogue where, within Beckett studies, various territories, both linguistic and cultural, can be explored and different approaches combined. The hope is that by offering them a place to showcase their publications, *Limit(e)* will bring researchers—whether anglophone or francophone, young or established—into increased contact with one another.

The following is a list (by no means exhaustive) of themes on which we invite papers:

1. The current situation in francophone and anglophone Beckett research (with points of agreement and divergencies)
2. Bilingualism, in relation to translation as the site of passage from one language to another
3. Interconnections between literature and philosophy
4. Literature and psychoanalysis
5. Literature and other artistic media, for example, painting, music, visual arts
6. Comparative literature (Beckett and other authors)
7. Literature and science
8. Other themes connected with the notion of 'limit' in Beckett's work, such as passages, thresholds, borders, edges, and contours.

We are pleased to announce the launching of the bi-annual electronic journal, *Limit(e) Beckett* (0 issue). *Limit(e) Beckett* is an international electronic journal, published by a team of Beckett doctoral candidates in partnership with two universities: Paris IV-Sorbonne and Paris VII-Denis Diderot.

Languages: French and English

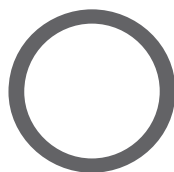
Format: Abstract (2 pages, spacing 1.5)

Deadline for submissions: 30 November 2008

We will contact the authors of the selected abstracts at the beginning of January 2009. Articles (between 15000 and 35000 characters, spaces included) should be submitted by the 31 March 2009.

Online publication: Spring 2009, on the site *Limit(e) Beckett* (under construction)

Contact: limitebeckett@gmail.com



THE BECKETT CIRCLE LE CERCLE DE BECKETT

Department of English
Xavier University
3800 Victory Parkway
Cincinnati, Ohio 45207-4446



THE SAMUEL BECKETT SOCIETY

The Samuel Beckett Society is an international organization of scholars, students, directors, actors and others who share an interest in the work of Samuel Beckett. Honorary Trustees are Edward Beckett, John Calder, J.M. Coetzee, Ruby Cohn, Raymond Federman, John Fletcher, James Knowlson, and Barney Rosset.

The Society provides opportunities for members to meet and exchange information. Membership includes a subscription to *The Beckett Circle*, the biannual newsletter of the Society. The annual meeting of the Society's Executive Board is held during the MLA Annual Convention. Individual membership is \$35.00 per year and \$60.00 for two years. Library membership is \$35.00 per year. Student membership is \$20.00 per year. Donations over and above the membership fee are welcome and tax deductible.

For membership inquiries, write to:

Professor Linda Ben-Zvi
Department of Theatre Studies
Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 69978
Israel
[E-mail lindabz@post.tau.ac.il](mailto:lindabz@post.tau.ac.il)
Tel. +97236408612 (w)
+97299508356 (h)
Fax +9723548006604

Members or prospective members are requested to remit their fees in US Dollars in the form of cash, checks, or International Money Orders made out to "The Samuel Beckett Society." Fees received in any other form will have to be returned.