



THE BECKETT CIRCLE LE CERCLE DE BECKETT

Newsletter of the Samuel Beckett Society

A Lucky Tirade: Royal Haymarket's Godot

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works... of Samuel Beckett, one could praise this production for its inclusive and accessible reading of this tragicomedy which no doubt has widened readership and spectatorship considerably. However, purists take note: this production is Pozzo-like in execution (it is bombastic and over-bearing in Act One and blinded without a language for its suffering in Act Two). London audiences have experienced many revivals of the play over recent years, most notably the long-running Gate Theatre production (directed by Walter Asmus) as part of the centenary celebrations at the Barbican in 2006 and Peter Hall's third revival of the play in the same year. Both directors used their life-long associations with the text to reappraise the work each time, to "fail better" with the piece in much the same way as Beckett returned to "this bloody play" as a director "undoing" his own writing. However, it is also rewarding to see new practitioners

come to the play for the first time, using its universal poetic quality to resonate with cultural and political forces of a specific historical moment (one thinks of notable productions in San Quentin, Sarajevo and New Orleans). Unfortunately, Sean Mathias retreats from contemporary resonances in the Theatre Royal Haymarket's revival (March-August 2009), and he also sacrifices many opportunities to explore the musicality of the text and its desolate heart. Unlike his author, Mathias seems unsure about rejecting conventional dramatic form and is unable to relate the content to post-millennial economic and spiritual breakdown. His work is littered with unnecessary sound effects and self-referential lighting states as part of an over-arching melodramatic aesthetic.

The assured commercial success of this production lies in the casting: Ian McKellen, Patrick Stewart, Simon Callow and Ronald Pickup. Initially this is a promising quartet: both McKellen

In This Issue:

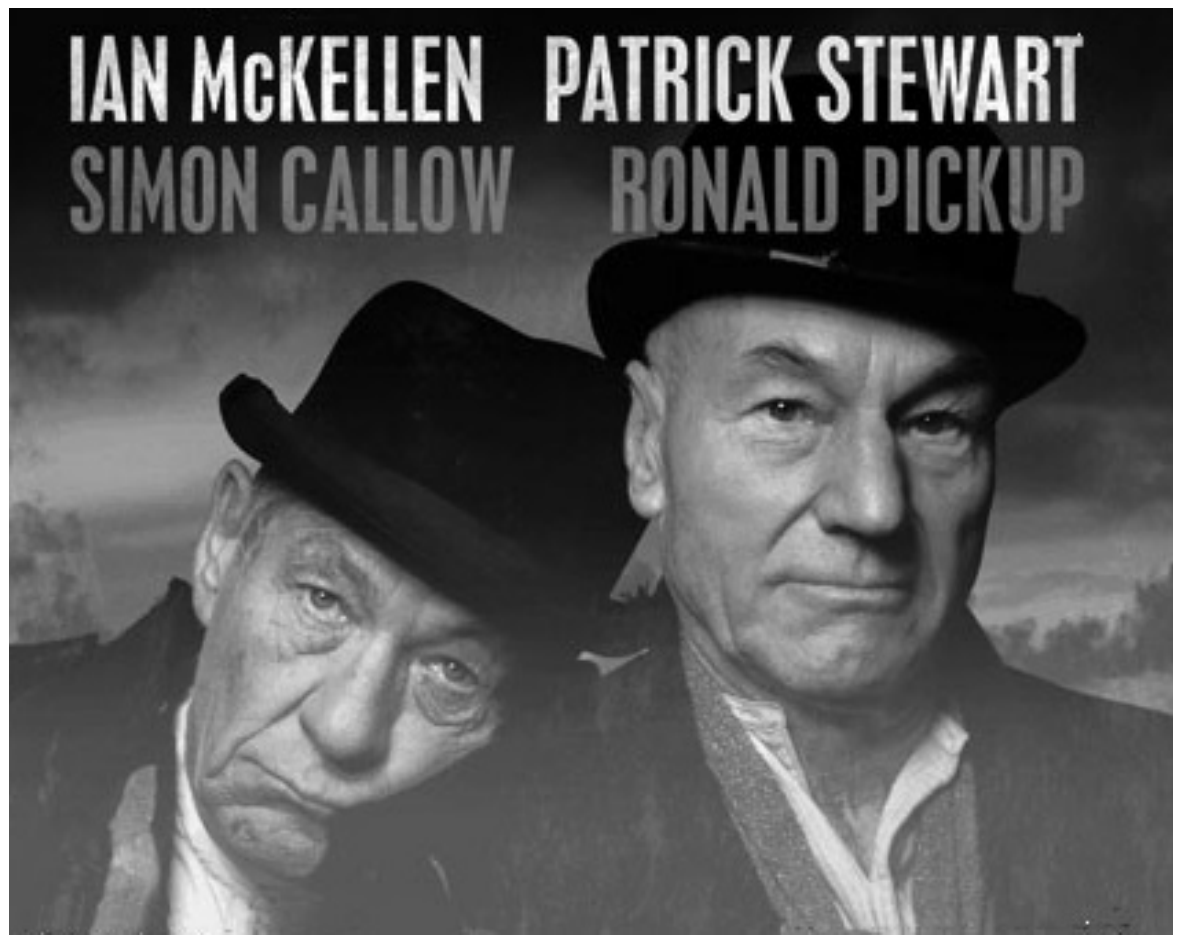
Essay by Angela Moorjani

Performance
Reviews from
London,
New York,
Minneapolis,
Cambridge and
Spoleto

Conferences
Reviews from
Lisbon and Paris

Book Reviews by
Gibson, Boyce
and Uhlmann

Fall 2009
Volume 32
No.2



and Stewart have recently exhausted the major tragic roles in the Shakespearean canon at Stratford-upon-Avon with the Royal Shakespeare Company. The prospect of a Lear/Gogo (McKellen) and a Prospero/Didi (Stewart) fires the imagination with the promise of technical excellence and tragic depth. Instead, we have the music hall, resonant within the play no doubt, but presented here as end-of-the-pier slapstick without an authentically tragic counterpoint. Their banter has a northern English conversational tone, and frequently appeals to its audience for laughter and applause. Callow makes his Beckett debut here as Pozzo, which is played with the Dickensian brutality and verve which has made this actor's name, not unwelcome in the performance of this role and expertly peeled away for his second appearance. His resonant monosyllabic commands cut through everything else on stage during his first appearance, but he later emerges as a character of dishevelled disability. Pickup, the only member of the cast to have worked with Beckett, initially gives Lucky a didactic tone before embarking on an unusual reading of the monologue which is more fragmented than flowing. His staccato delivery leads up to a mechanistic repetition of "the skull the skull the skull" and provides the only truly challenging sequence for this audience, whom he directly addresses. Although drawn to the play by its famous cast, this infamous tirade reasserts the play's absurdist roots and makes Pickup an instrument for dissonant music. Only the arrival of the boy takes us into genuinely melancholic territory, enabling Stewart to achieve a tragic quality not exhibited elsewhere. The song at the top of the second act is played for laughs and the subsequent dialogue between Stewart and McKellen lacks the poetic silences of the text. In short, Act Two continues the almost pantomimic mode of the production which often allows the play to be interrupted by the audience applauding the action.

"If they did it my way they would empty the theatre," Beckett reportedly admitted when considering a *Godot* revival. Where he would have divided circles, empty crosses and void, this production has a specific theatrical setting (the tree has burst through the floorboards of a disused playhouse) and linear blocking (characters emerge on right angles from either upstage trapdoor "graves" or through downstage entrance points underneath a faux proscenium arch). Stephen Brimson Lewis' design rejects the liminal space of Beckett's country road for a dilapidated theatre. This re-visioning of Beckett's play is more controversial than most reviewers have noted. Firstly, it jeopardises some of the text's visual elements, most notably the empty space that should surround the characters, prompting lines such as "there's no lack of void." Secondly, it pushes us explicitly towards the post-war resonances of the text, perhaps representing a bombed out theatre during the Blitz. We imagine Vladimir and Estragon in an East End music hall during World War II, haunted by Pozzo's star-turn, waiting for the salvation of audience and longing for a spectatorship that

"Instead, we have the music hall, resonant within the play no doubt, but presented here as end-of-the-pier slapstick without an authentically tragic counterpoint."

will laugh at their routines and make sense of their empty performances. Choosing to physically locate this play within this setting (something that even the pre-show, interval and curtain call music emphasises), creates a show that is either radically innovative or deeply reductive, depending on one's position on the controversies surrounding post-humorous Beckett in performance. Watching the production towards the beginning of its run in a modern auditorium, the decision to set the action in a disused theatre was accentuated still further. Watching the production towards the end of its run in a traditional West End playhouse, the visual concept was considerably softened, though it could lead many newcomers to the conclusion that Beckett decided to write a play about the theatre itself. In many ways this is the boldest aspect of the production. Many versions have dealt with Beckett's self-referential meta-theatricality; for example, Peter Hall often emphasises the music-hall style canter and vaudevillian elements of the play in performance. Generations of Beckett practitioners have used the transitional register between tragedy and comedy to enable the text, in the same way producers of

classical tragedy might accentuate the grotesque to expose tragic ideas through comic parody. One thinks here of Jan Kott's approach to *King Lear* (via *Endgame*) and his citation of not just the

grotesque, but also the pantomime, to understand the work of both the Shakespearean and Beckettian in performance.

However, we have something else at play in Mathias' production. Perhaps in a system that has enabled "stars of the day" to play Beckett's "people falling to bits," we see McKellen, Stewart, et al, extending their West End run by two months beyond its original booking period. One recalls the Williams/Martin *Godot* in the U.S. in 1988, at the end of the Regan years, and acceptable only "if audience members can forget the Beckett masterpiece that is being obliterated" (*Time Magazine*). Or one recalls the Mayall/Edmondson *Godot* in Britain in 1991, shortly after the Thatcher-Major transition of power. The latest struggle is to comprehend this post-Blair and neo-Brownite *Godot*. As Britain slips into crisis, it is concerning that *Waiting for Godot* is out-selling some West End musicals, and its leading men are prepared to perform even a vaudevillian curtain call to rescue us from the supposed ordeal of having endured a Beckett play. While it is fascinating that the play should break box office records during a recession, it is alarming that the creative team have relocated the universality of Beckett's setting to the comforting and familiar world of theatrical performance itself. Perhaps the dramatist of 1953 is finally being assaulted with escapist philosophies of entertainment and forced to "think pig" when things might be better left unsaid. The London audience of 2009 applauded the complacent curtain call, despite the play which, for Beckett, could be summed up in one word: "enough." ...in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished.

--Jonathan Heron

Godot at Studio 54

The paradox of the actor performing in *Waiting for Godot* is that Samuel Beckett's most famous play has for some time now been housed on the distinguished and sometimes dusty shelves of The Canon, and yet it is recent enough for its premiere and its playwright to be very much alive in our collective theatrical memory. Gogo and Didi, while wracked with inaction, aren't at all like Hamlet, at least for the actors who play them. Shakespeare, while very much present in our collective theatrical consciousness, is every inch a legend. Beckett, by contrast, is mostly still a man, because there are still people alive who knew him and worked with him. This, I imagine, makes his work all the more terrifying for actors to confront in production. And if one happens to be very, very famous—say, for example, if you are Nathan Lane or John Goodman—the situation is probably even worse.

Most actors who play *Waiting for Godot* can slink comfortably back into the kind of obscurity they found themselves in when rehearsals began. A rare few, such as Barry McGovern or Bill Irwin, the latter of whom appeared onstage with Goodman and Lane in The Roundabout Theater's recent production at Studio 54 (April 3-July 12, 2009), are exceptions. McGovern and Irwin have made names for themselves with an adept and graceful balance between the acute fragility and brash clowning required for doing justice to this monster of the theater, inducted almost at its conception into the mythos of the dramatic (un)conscious. Most of the starry stars who play Beckett, however, are destined to disappoint. Their reputations have preceded them, and everyone has already tried to imagine what Nathan Lane's Estragon will be like when they arrive at the theater. The trouble is that Gogo, too, has a reputation of his own. He already exists in our imagination, even though he is invisible until an actor steps into his boots onstage. There have been hundreds and hundreds of Hamlets, many more

than there have been Estragons, and in many different historical periods. This absolves the actor who plays Hamlet of a certain level of responsibility. We are still living within a generation or two from the moment in which Gogo was invented, and this puts a good deal of pressure on the actor who plays him. Witness, for example, the recent article on *Godot* by John Lahr in the *New Yorker*. Almost in the same breath, Lahr reviewed the Roundabout Theater production and meditated on his father's experience as the first Gogo to tread the Broadway boards.

It is precisely this kind of consideration that could drive an actor to distraction if he knows his theater history, as Nathan Lane surely does. Lane is also diligent, dedicated, and (justly) celebrated. Thus we arrive at the paradox of this actor, who appears to be consumed with doubt about his own presence in this part. My own prejudices about Lane left me with the opinion, before seeing the production, that a director would have a difficult time pulling the reins in on him. It is impossible to know what happened in the rehearsal room, of course, but Anthony Page seems to have had some effect on Lane, for better or for worse. Little of the actor's usual hysterical vaudevillian persona—which would perhaps have been welcome in a portrayal of Beckett's tramp—is in evidence. The vaudevillian hasn't completely disappeared, however, and in a moment that is one of Lane's finest, it surfaces. He performs the dazzling feat of what appears to be some combination of a wrestling match and an awkward tango between Gogo and Pozzo's whip, which the former has picked up from the floor to hand back to its owner. This may have been a bit much, but it was a welcome change from Lane's otherwise insecure base of operations, providing a vivid moment of pleasure, even if the pleasure was a bit guilty.

For the most part, the uncertainty and insecurity that overwhelms Lane's performance is characteristic of the entire production, which doesn't quite seem to know what it wants. Irwin's Didi is physically sophisticated, but never seems psychologically grounded, maybe because it isn't quite possible to latch on to Lane. The set, by Santo Loquasto, with its looming, craggy rock-scape and cracked, dry, desert ground, is a little too aggressive for the tentative steps of its main inhabitants. John Goodman's Pozzo is as loud and belligerent as the scenery, but his voice sounds too hoarse for the usual well-trained Broadway fare, and he isn't able to convey any of Pozzo's human weakness when he reappears in Act II, debilitated by blindness and all but eviscerated by his fall.

John Glover, as Lucky, provides the bright spot of the production. His perfor-



Roundabout Theatre Company's WAITING FOR GODOT
Pictured (l-r): John Glover, Bill Irwin, Nathan Lane, John Goodman
Photo Credit: Joan Marcus, 2009

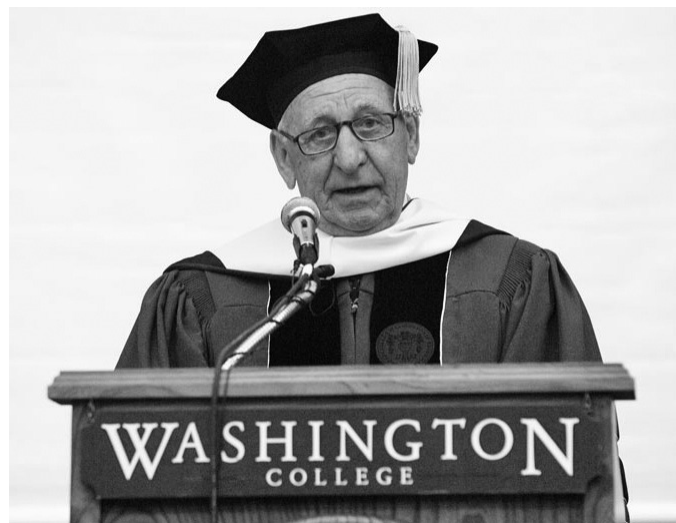
mance is subtle and measured. Lucky appears to be in a world apart, untouched by the struggles of his fellow actors, intent on the task at hand. Irwin has a thrilling moment when he apes Glover's Lucky, made all the more exciting by the specificity of Glover's performance, Irwin's skill as a mimic, and our own knowledge of Irwin's distinguished history in the role. In the internet trailer for the production, aimed at Roundabout Theater subscribers, Goodman describes Pozzo as "a Nazi character, but with a heart of gold," while Glover describes his own process of approaching Lucky as "learning to speak the language of aphasia." These comments, packaged for advertising though they are, belie the differences in the approaches of the two actors, which ultimately prove to be insurmountable in this production.

Somehow, despite repeated signs to the contrary, the production, like the play itself, keeps one hoping for a miracle, or at least for some definitive movement towards something relatively better, or even relatively worse. There is something earnest and honest about Lane's attempts, and it is apparent that with a different set of circumstances, Bill Irwin could deliver a stellar performance. In the end, the audience is consigned to the kind of purgatory that Gogo and Didi experience, seated by a tree, waiting for something to happen.

--Jessica Brater



Roundabout Theatre Company's WAITING FOR GODOT
Pictured (l-r): Nathan Lane, Bill Irwin
Photo Credit: Hoan Marcus, 2009



Washington College Honors Raymond Federman

In the fall of 2006 Washington College celebrated the Beckett centenary with a series of lectures by Beckett specialists and with a stage reading by Barry McGovern. One of the lecturers, Raymond Federman, also met with the students enrolled in my experimental fiction seminar, in which we were reading his recently translated *To Whom It May Concern* (*A qui de droit*). Rebecca Streaker, one of the students in that class, was so impressed by Federman—both the man and the work—that, after becoming the president of the 2009 senior class, she recommended that the college's Board of Visitors and Governors award an honorary degree to him. The board agreed, as did Federman, after he recovered from his initial surprise.

Graduation weekend featured a number of events, including the Senior Luncheon, at which the entire class celebrated Federman's eighty-first birthday, and a public reading from his work that was attended by our local "favorite son" writer, the novelist John Barth, with whom Federman had been colleagues for several years at SUNY Buffalo. At the commencement ceremony itself, college president Baird Tipson—after recalling the deportation of Federman's family from their home in the Montrouge suburb of Paris on July 16, 1942, his arrival in the United States in 1947, and the subsequent distinctions that he achieved as an avant-garde fiction writer and literary critic (including his landmark dissertation, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*)—awarded him the honorary degree, "In recognition of his significant literary contributions and his faith in the power of the written word to transcend the unspeakable."

--Tom Cousineau

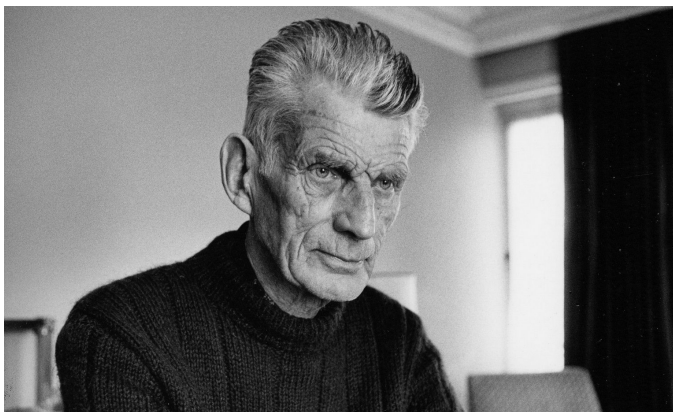
Editor's Note: We note with sadness the passing of Raymond Federman on October 6, 2009. We anticipate a piece reflecting upon his life and work in the Spring 2010 issue of the newsletter.

Beckett Lecture at Tel Aviv

Gerry Dukes, a leading Irish author, editor, and former University of Limerick lecturer, presented the Annual Samuel Beckett Lecture at Tel Aviv University on May 19, 2009. The lecture series, now in its third year, is sponsored by The Embassy of Ireland Culture Division, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, The Samuel Beckett Society of Israel, and the Theatre Studies Department, Tel Aviv University.

His talk was entitled "'Are They All Still Asleep Over There?': Beckett's Cultural Politics." Using Beckett's letters to Thomas McGreevy written in the early thirties, and references in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks than Kicks*, Dukes argued that it is possible to plot with considerable accuracy the increasing antipathy Beckett felt towards his native land and its "official" culture. The two most explicit statements of the antipathy he felt while living in Ireland can be found in his essay "Censorship in the Saorstát" and, in high comic mode, in the opening paragraphs of Chapter Four in *Murphy*. Dukes pointed out that after Beckett's move to France in 1937, more nuanced attitudes about Ireland emerge, particularly in his postwar French language fiction (and increasingly so in the self translations into English). This change may be related to his wartime experiences in France.

--Linda Ben-Zvi



Samuel Beckett Working Group

The next Beckett Working Group will be held at the IFTR conference in Munich, July 2010. The topic the group has chosen is "New Approaches to Beckett's Radio and Television Dramas." Please send titles, one page abstracts, and short bios to Linda Ben-Zvi (lindabz@post.tau.ac.il) by 1 March.

The Samuel Beckett Working Group in Lisbon

The Samuel Beckett Working Group met at the 52nd Annual Conference of the International Federation of Theatre Research (13th-18th July 2009). It was held at the University of Lisbon. Lisbon is a wonderful city and the weather was glorious. The title and theme of the conference was "Silent Voices, Forbidden Lives: Censorship and Performance," and there were nearly 300 papers from scholars all over the world. As always this was a truly international conference.

The Samuel Beckett Working Group's membership was also international: Jackie Blackman (Ireland), Julie Campbell (U.K.), Tom Cousineau (U.S.A.), Cristina Cano Vara (Spain), Irit Degani Raz (Israel), Takeshi Kawashima (Japan), David Jones (U.K.) and Rob Reginio (U.S.A.). Linda Ben-Zvi (Israel) was the convener and chair of the group and did a superb job in terms of organization, and in creating a collegial atmosphere which enabled and promoted some very useful and in-depth discussions. The papers of each of the group members were circulated to the other members over a month before we met. At the meetings each member introduced their paper briefly and at least thirty minutes was devoted to discussion.

The first paper to be discussed was Rob Reginio's "Obsolescence and Archive: Beckett Performing Testimony Across Media." Reginio focused on *That Time*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Cascando*, bringing in Giorgio Agamben's work on testimony and the archive, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, and Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* and his work on Paul Celan in *Sovereignities in Question*. Atom Egoyen's 2002 museum installation *Steenbeckett* was an important element of the paper, described by Reginio as producing "a basis for an exploration of the manner in which technology and our hunger for memory produces obsolescence." This was a very interesting paper, which stimulated a lot of discussion, for example in relation to the desire to collect memories, so clearly dramatized in *Krapp*, as against the eventual evaporation of memories.

A discussion of Irit Degani Raz's paper followed. This explored, as her title makes clear, "The Idea of a 'Limit' in Beckett's Works." The relevance of limits was cogently argued: physical as well as mental. Degani Raz focused on *Imagination Dead Imagine* which she described as an imaginative exploration of "the limits of that ultimate medium: the artist's imagination itself." The discussion began with the group considering the geometrical shapes that feature in the text and asking for further explanation from Degani Raz, who suggested that they are the basic axioms of the imagination, and utilized for the very reason that the limit of imagination cannot be known, only the approach to the limit.

David Jones' paper "Performing Memory: From the Posthuman to the Inhuman" prompted a lively discussion. It was related to Reginio's paper in interesting ways, and was a tightly argued and stimulating exploration of *Happy Days* and *The Lost Ones* in relation to the ways in which "Beckett's work weds biological death to species extinc-

tion and to the end of human epistemology." Jones used Jean-François Lyotard's theoretical approach in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, and N. K. Hayes' considerations in *How We Became Posthuman*, and interrogates Martin Esslin's earlier ideas on the theatre of the absurd, pointing to the epistemological unease in both *Happy Days* and *The Lost Ones*, and how the narrative viewpoint in the latter can be described as being outside the category of the human.

My paper followed with the overlong title, "'Getting down, getting below the surface, concentrating, listening, getting your ear down so you can hear the infinitesimal murmur': The inner voice and what lurks beneath it in 'Rough for Radio II.'" The paper brings together interviews with Beckett concerning artistic creation (with Lawrence Harvey, Charles Juliet, James Knowlson and Lawrence Shainberg), his "Psychology Notes," and sections from the recently published letters in order to get some grasp on what has been called the parody of artistic creation in "Rough for Radio II."

Tom Cousineau's paper, "Symmetry Restored: A Bi-Logical Reading of *Waiting for Godot*," drew upon Ignacio Matte Blanco's distinction between the *asymmetrical* (or "Aristotelean") logic of conscious thinking and the *symmetrical* logic of unconscious thinking. He also referred to René Girard's theory regarding the relationship between scapegoating and religious rituals. He argued that the symmetries found in Beckett's theatre stage the re-emergence of "unconscious logic" within a genre whose quite opposing principles had been codified by Aristotle. He also interpreted these elements as implying a return to the religious sources of classical theatre, with the important difference that, while Beckett foregrounds the "choral" origins of drama through his "form in movement," he suppresses its sacrificial elements. Thus Beckett creates a kind of theatre in which the efficacy of the scapegoat is demystified and the audience loses its privileged position as the detached observer of others suffering.

Cristina Cano Varo's paper "Beckett's Rewriting of his Early Plays: A 'Standard of Fidelity' and Beyond" made a convincing case concerning Beckett's re-evaluation of his early plays in the light of his growing understanding of the theatre, through directing his plays, and especially through the development of his own theatre poetics during his career. Cano Varo contends that the theatrical experimentation he brought to his later (post-*Play*) plays influenced the new directions and revisions he brought into productions of his earlier plays. This involved tightening certain areas, speeding up or slowing down specific sequences, cutting dialogue and adding directions. This was a well researched and well presented paper, which makes a strong case in relation to Beckett going beyond his own "standards of fidelity."

In "Irish Biopolitics in the 1930s: Beckett, Censorship, and Birth Control," Takeshi Kawashima focused on characters' attitudes to sexuality in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, *First Love*, *Endgame* and *All That Fall* in relation to Beckett's article "Censorship in the Saorstát." Kawashima considers that "Beckett's focus [in this article] is placed on reproductive freedom, and the relationship between

birthing and the State." He suggests that "the hatred of sexual reproduction in Beckett's early prose work is his way of announcing a farewell to Irish sexual politics." It was useful to have this article focused on in such depth, and the group discussed the ways in which the Irish state was attempting a very strict control over the Irish people, in relation to publication of certain "dangerous" material, and even controlling their bodies in relation to sexuality and procreation.

The final paper was Jackie Blackman's "Beckett's *Eleutheria* and Sartre's *Nekrassov*: Two 'Failed' French (Irish-Soviet) Satires of 'The Koestler-Kravchenko Era.'" This paper held real interest, telling of the defection of Victor Kravchenko, an official at the Soviet Purchasing Commission in Washington, D.C. His memoir, *I Chose Freedom*, caused a real stir, and was used as anti-Communist/pro-capitalist propaganda. The revelations of Stalinist atrocities were very problematic for left-wing ideologues such as John-Paul Sartre. Blackman makes a very interesting comparison of the two plays under discussion. She contends that "Victor Krapp, the anti-hero of *Eleutheria*" can be read as "the embodiment of a Beckett-Kravchenko-like self-exile in Paris and also the antecedent of Sartre's metamorphosing trickster, de Valera-Nekrassov."

The discussions were all so lively and engaged that we always ran over time. When Linda Ben-Zvi brought the proceedings to a close, she declared it to have been both a useful and enjoyable Working Group, to which we all agreed. Everyone was given a space to speak, and everyone's comments were treated with respect. It is an excellent forum, for established scholars and for those just starting out, and the bringing together of many different approaches to Beckett from different parts of the world works extraordinary well. It was a real privilege to be a part of this. Ben-Zvi suggested that we all keep in touch with one another, and also asked for suggestions for topics for next year's Working Group, due to take place in Munich.

I also want to mention one more excellent paper on Beckett presented at the conference. Nicholas Johnson, who wrote reported in *The Beckett Circle* for the 2006 Working Group in Dublin, gave a paper entitled, "Theatre of the Unword: Samuel Beckett and the Law of Genre." This fine paper began by questioning the "law of genre" in our current "postpostmodernist" times (my term not his!). He explored "the significance of genre in general, the relevance conditions of copyright law, and the barriers intentionally placed by the Beckett Estate" concerning adaptations of prose fiction for the stage. It was very well presented, based on a thorough knowledge of what Johnson termed "the rich heritage of adaptations of Samuel Beckett's prose," and the tensions, resistances and censorship surrounding them. This is an area which the Working Group had discussed, and as Ben-Zvi pointed out, it is a controversial area which always becomes a part of the discussion at every Working Group (and perhaps at every gathering of Beckett scholars). Johnson has contributed a new approach and a cogent set of arguments to this ongoing debate.

--Julie Campbell

Whence Estragon?

On 13 April 2006, Irène Lindon donated the manuscript notebook of *En attendant Godot* to the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), making it available to scholars in the BnF's Performing Arts Department (Arts du spectacle) located on rue de Richelieu. Begun 9 October 1948 and completed less than four months later on 29 January 1949, the holograph introduces two look-alike old men (*vieillards*) under the names Lévy and Vladimir. The name Estragon appears for the first time on the last verso page of the first act, Beckett having written his

text on the recto pages of the notebook (until they ran out), leaving most of the verso pages for insertions and doodles. I remember the name scrawled on a slant as the only word on the page. From where did this name surface doodlelike onto

the page? Lévy has become Estragon / Gogo by the beginning of the second act, although, apparently forgetting his unexplained name change, the author reverts twice to Lévy on the act's third page before crossing it out to stay with Estragon to the end.

Let us look at the name *Lévy*: both a first and last name of biblical origin, its meaning (from the Hebrew) "joined to" or "attached to" makes it particularly apt for one of the play's two inseparable *vieillards*. A widely found Jewish surname, Lévy and its variants are also first names, adopted, for instance, by Protestants after the Reformation (see Campbell). But when in his very first line of the manuscript version (delayed to the second page of the published play), Vladimir, addressing both himself and Lévy by name, claims that without him, Lévy would be nothing but "un petit tas d'ossements à l'heure qu'il est" ("nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute"), the Russian and Jewish names take on historical significance, evoking the liberation of Nazi concentration camps by Soviet troops at the end of the 1939-1945 war.

I am not the only one to wonder how the generic Jewish name Lévy turned into the herbal name Estragon. In "Beckett Judaizing Beckett: 'a Jew from Greenland' in Paris," Jackie Blackman suggests that "with the erasure of Lévy, Beckett removed any opportunity for Jewish stereotyping" (332). For Rosette Lamont, the allusion to Jewish suffering evoked by the name Lévy is maintained in the name Estragon by its connection with biblical wormwood and the bitter herbs of the Passover meal that serve as reminders of the slavery the Hebrews endured before the Exodus (36; qtd. in Blackman 332). I would like to propose another possible link between the two names. The French / English *estragon*, an aromatic plant with a yellowish flower, may have imposed itself on the bilingual writer in search of a more obscure name in the manner of poetic condensation: *estragon*, containing the anagram *star*, which, joined to the

"(...) *estragon*, containing the anagram star, which, joined to the herb's yellow-colored flower, brings to mind the notorious sign of Nazi persecution of the Jews."

herb's yellow-colored flower, brings to mind the notorious sign of Nazi persecution of the Jews.

Other writers and artists in the post-war years often found the traumatic nightmares of the war haunting or invading their pages and canvases. It happened famously to Francis Bacon. A few months before his death in 1992, Bacon repeated to Michel Archimbaud what he had confided to other interviewers over the years: the forms of his renowned 1946 *Painting* imposed themselves on him unexpectedly, as if accidentally (64-65). Instead of the landscape he was in the process of sketching, there appeared a

butcher shop with slabs of meat

and a large cruciform

carcass hanging be-

hind a black-suited

male figure seated

within a low fenced

circle. The man's an-

guished face is partly

concealed by an open

black umbrella. But it

is the detail of a bright

yellow boutonnière (probably a begonia) pinned to the figure's left chest that particularly concerns us. The yellow stars forced on the Jews were worn at this spot. It is this detail of Bacon's gruesome painting, a detail cavalierly termed "incongruous" on the Museum of Modern Art's website, which, in the manner of poetic or dream displacement, transforms his painting into an involuntary dirge for the recent war's butchery, the stuff of unspeakable nightmares. This flower memorial brings me back to the yellow-flowered estragon. It too perhaps materialized on Beckett's doodle page, the work of dreams and mourning, to enable him to bear witness, in the only way he deemed possible, mutely, indirectly.

--Angela Moorjani

Works Cited

- Bacon, Francis. *Entretiens avec Archimbaud*. Paris: Gallimard-Folio Essais, 1996.
- . *Painting*. 1946. Oil and pastel on linen. Museum of Mod. Art, New York.
- Beckett, Samuel. *En attendant Godot*. 1948-1949. MS MY-440. BnF, Paris.
- Blackman, Jackie. "Beckett Judaizing Beckett: 'a Jew from Greenland' in Paris." *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 18. Ed. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 325-40.
- Campbell, Mike. "Levi." *Behind the Name: The Etymology and History of First Names*. n. d. Web. 17 Aug. 2009.
- Lamont, Rosette. "Samuel Beckett's Wandering Jew." *Reflections of the Holocaust in Art and Literature*. Ed. Randolph L. Braham. Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1990. 35-53.
- Museum of Modern Art (New York). "The Collection: Francis Bacon. *Painting*. 1946." 2009. Web. 16 July 2009. <<http://www.moma.org/collection/>>.

Endgame Returns to ART

Beginning on Valentine's Day and running through March 21, 2009, The American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts staged Beckett's *Endgame*. Beckett scholars will remember that this was the second time that the ART produced *Endgame*. The first staging in 1984, directed by Joanne Akalaitis, was the subject of great controversy when Beckett himself attempted to shutdown the play with a formal injunction. Beckett launched into an uproar upon learning that his stage directions, which call for "bare interior" and "grey light," had been replaced by an abandoned subway station in what appeared to be a post-nuclear New York City, as well as numerous other departures from the original design including, in his own words, an attempt to "musicalize" the play with an overture by Philip Glass. The show did eventually go on, however, with the stipulation that the program contain an insert by Beckett stating that the play was believed by the author to be "a farce on the original," and that the audience should be "disgusted" by it. Robert Brustein, then the ART's artistic director, responded with a defense of the play, stating that ART "revered Beckett above all other modern playwrights," and that if every single stage direction must adhere to the text, then the theatre wouldn't be bringing out "plays so much as corpses."

Fast-forward twenty-five years to the ART's current production of *Endgame*. No injunctions have been raised, Beckett is no longer alive, the ART has come under new direction, and resident director Marcus Stern was given the task of reviving *Endgame* "within the parameters as set forth by the text of the play." And with the exception of one addition to the play's production design, the directors of this play rigidly adhered to the text. This production was far more loyal to the author's original design, relying instead on the strength of its actor's performances and disciplined directing, and as a result achieved a performance that would have made its author proud, and that audiences at the ART won't soon forget.

The bare interior and grey light returned, as the entire

action of the play passed its course in a cramped room which seemed to float disembodied amidst the blackness of the theatre. Indeed, the effect of the cramped box-like stage created an alienating effect from the rest of the theatre very appropriate to the play. In lieu of highly positioned windows, set designer Andromache Chalfant chose two large curtained windows that were all but boarded up, but for the very topmost section, accessible only to Clov with the aid of his stepladder. This production of *Endgame* was particularly skillful in drawing out the play's self-referential themes and comedy. Yet director Marcus Stern did not leave it to Beckett's character's banter alone. In the final moments of the play, Chalfant deconstructed the set, unhinging the three walls and having them slowly recede to the extremities of the stage. The effect was achieved by constructing the walls of the play on rails, with invisible grips simultaneously pulling them towards the limits of the theater at the desired moment, in this case, at the closing moments for a dramatic finish. Although undoubtedly this was the play's biggest "special effect," it was a subtle improvement that caught this audience member by surprise. The focal point of the scene is, of course, Hamm's final tableau, and the lighting so naturally drew one to LeBow's pained, moribund expression, that one nearly failed to notice that the walls of the play were coming apart. Altogether the effect worked masterfully, and one fancies that even Beckett might have approved of it.

The success of any *Endgame* depends chiefly upon on the two lead actors. Will LeBow as Hamm and Thomas Derrah as Clov responded to this challenge with brilliant performances, each peppering their roles with style and mannerisms that complimented their individual strengths and added depth and freshness to the play. LeBow played up the ham-actor with the tenor-like crispness in his voice, and Derrah made Clov's "staggering walk" seem awkward, clownish, and yet hilariously funny. Derrah's Clov was decidedly effeminate, emphasizing the pseudo-couple relationship of Hamm and Clov, an element of the play that is sometimes underestimated. The comic timing

of each merits praise, as does the effectiveness with which both actors transitioned quickly and credibly from inhuman comedy to profound sorrow. LeBow's Hamm was the youngest and most virile Hamm I'd ever seen. He resembled something of a disabled veteran, emphasizing the political nuances of this Cold War play reprised in the midst of our latest global conflict. Indeed, LeBow's youth recalled the setting of *Endgame* as it was first imagined in a hospital environment, reminiscent of Beckett's own experiences in the St. Lô hospital outside Normandy just after the Al-

Will LeBow as Hamm and Thomas Derrah as Clov. Photo courtesy of ART.



lied invasion. The disparity of age between Hamm and Clov was less pronounced in this production than in others, though Derrah's Clov displayed a juvenile, clownish and effete nature that provided endless entertainment. With LeBow's booming, mock-Shakespearean tone and cleverly-timed asides, the two evoked humor from this play in ways I hadn't thought possible. Remo Airaldi as Nagg and Karen MacDonald as Nell were both horrifying and hilarious spectacles in their respective roles. Airaldi, an ART veteran, lit up the stage from his diminutive position in the ashbin with a spirited telling of the play's only straightforward joke, that of the tailor's failure to mend the businessman's trousers. This was one of the funniest *Endgame*'s I've ever seen.

The ART's revival of *Endgame* proved a great success, with director Marcus Stern finding room for subtle innovation while remaining true to the playwright's design. The onstage chemistry between Lebow and Derrah elicited a wealth of comic energy. This production of *Endgame* was a worthy testament to the vitality of Beckett's enduring work

twenty-five years after the play's controversial Cambridge debut.

--Adam J. Dixon

Cast And Crew

Hamm: Will LeBow

Clov: Thomas Derrah

Nagg: Remo Airaldi

Nell: Karen MacDonald

Director: Marcus Stern

Set design: Andromache Chalfant

Costume design: Clint Ramos

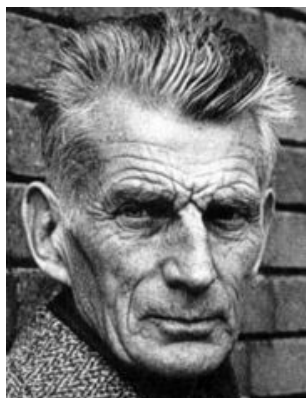
Lighting design: Scott Zielinski

Sound design: David Remedios

Stage manager: Katherine Shea

Dramaturgs: Ryan McKittrick and Heidi Nelson

Voice and Speech: Nancy Houfek



Samuel Beckett Society

Membership and Dues Form

One year:	\$35
Two years:	\$60
Students:	\$20 (one year only)

Membership includes a subscription to *The Beckett Circle*, published twice yearly. Members of the SBS are also eligible for a subscription to the *Journal of Beckett Studies* at a reduced rate; please go to www.eupjournals.com/jobs/page/subscribe for more information.

Checks made out to the Samuel Beckett Society are accepted in the following forms:

- US dollars drawn on US banks, or a money orders in US dollars
- Canadian dollars drawn on Canadian banks
- Pounds sterling, drawn on British banks
- Euros drawn on banks from the European Monetary Union
- Checks in Japanese yen, Australian dollars or any other widely traded currency, so long as they are drawn on a bank using that currency

Membership and subscription dues can also be paid in various currencies by credit or debit card online through the SBS PayPal account. Go to the Samuel Beckett Endpage (www.ua.ac.be/beckett/) for more information.

Name _____

Address _____

Country _____

Email _____

Dues enclosed _____ Contribution _____

MAIL TO: Professor Richard Begam
Dept of English, Helen C. White Hall
600 N. Park St
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin, 53706

Endgame in Minneapolis

At a typical production of Beckett by Ten Thousand Things Theater Company (February 12–March 15, 2009), the tramps in the audience outnumber those onstage. These are people who have seen the inside of a dustbin, who are intimately familiar with days of repetition, monotony and boredom, of isolation, confinement, and having to answer to arbitrary orders. Although the company also offers performances for traditional paying audiences in several of the flexible-seating theatrical venues around Minneapolis, their core audiences are those who rarely if ever see live theater—those in prisons, homeless shelters, affordable housing complexes, senior care facilities—“because theater is richer when everyone is in the audience,” as their motto states. Artistic director Michelle Hensley is aiming not for a “social service theater” but for an Elizabethan breadth in her spectators and the electrifying charge of theater pared to its essence: text; expert actors; spare set pieces that can be swiftly set up and dismantled in whatever gymnasium, cafeteria, or community room presents itself as the day’s performance space; no theatrical lighting onstage or in house to segregate actors and spectators.

The company seems so intrinsically suited to staging Beckett that it’s a wonder they haven’t tackled more of the playwright’s work; their last foray was with a 2001 *Waiting for Godot*. As Hensley notes, “filling up time while you wait is something that many of our audiences in prisons and shelters are quite familiar with, as well as the dark humor that accompanies such waiting.” Theirs was the third production of *Endgame* I’d seen in Minneapolis in as many years and the one that brought home the realization of the ability of the audience to transform the possibilities of a text. Imagine the prison audience: how many identify with the suffering of Clov, seeing nothing outside the window yet desiring to leave, day after day having to listen to the same tirades and narratives and to hear the same insults

“One of the most fascinating elements, at least among my circle of companions, was how the play turned into a story of parallel marriages of a sort, with Hamm and Clov on their way to becoming Nagg and Nell.”

hurled. Or the audience in the nursing homes, wheeled to the cafeteria for the performance, watching Steve Hendrickson as Nagg, in a natty old suit and with a cheerful Irish brogue, bringing an uncomfortable concreteness to the question, “Has he changed your sawdust?” And then there is Barbra Berlovitz, a founding member of Theatre de la Jeune Lune, a sweetly spacey, haunting Nell who appears to contemporary eyes as an Alzheimer’s patient neglected and forgotten, unvisited, in the home. Meanwhile, Clov becomes an overworked orderly shuttling between needy patients, waiting for the day he can escape the drudgery. Accepting Beckett’s insistence that the choice of ashbins was “simply a question of logistics” that allowed the characters to be able to pop up and

down without leaving the stage” (Bair 469), what new resonance must be found in the sight of these aged progenitors, even accursed ones, being discarded in trash cans and left there to die.

Such is the potential of a Ten

Thousand Things show to make theater matter once again.

The February–March 2009 production was directed by Marion McClinton, best known for his stagings of August Wilson’s work. His casting of two African-American actors in the roles of Hamm and Clov (and white actors as Nagg and Nell) at first intimated a new take on the old master-slave dynamic in the play—and so there was, but it wasn’t related to race. The more noteworthy shift in that dynamic came from gender. Christiana Clark’s Clov, clad in baggy overalls, hair pinned up in a black knit cap, conveyed a gentle weariness of having been the caretaker of the other three for far too many years. Terry Bellamy (a founding member of Penumbra Theatre Company—it was a powerhouse cast) as Hamm was avuncular rather than tyrannical. Their newly gendered encounters—Hamm’s demands to “Kiss me” and Clov’s assertions of “I’ll leave you, I have things to do”; Hamm’s comments that “you loved me once” and confessions that “I’ve made you suffer too much”; the exchange “Why do you stay with me?” “Why do you keep me? “There’s no one else.” “There’s nowhere else”; one could go on and on—were imbued with, if not a sexual tension, then at least the strategies for avoidance practiced in a long-outworn relationship. One of the most fascinating elements, at least among my circle of companions, was how the play turned into a story of parallel marriages of a sort, with Hamm and Clov on their way to becoming Nagg and Nell. It brought to mind the anecdote repeated in Knowlson’s and Bair’s biographies in which Beckett leaves the rehearsal of *Endgame*, telling Roger Blin that “Hamm and Clov are Didi and Gogo at a later date,” and then adds, “actually, they are Suzanne and me.” McClinton’s casting decision for Clov, then, though unorthodox, may nevertheless be keenly faithful to Beckett’s original inspiration.

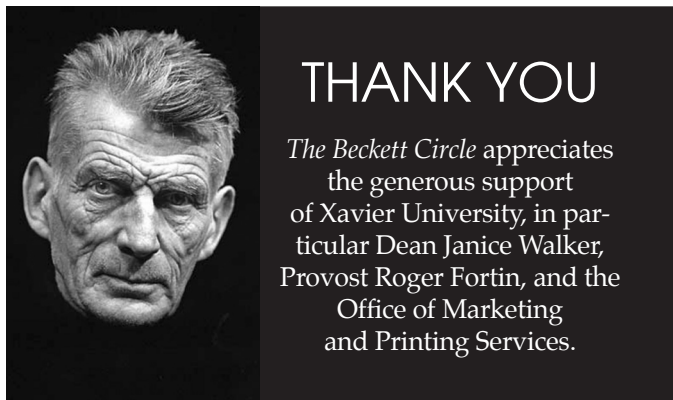
Because Ten Thousand Things’ aesthetic is necessarily so visually spare, their production team includes a live musician and sound effects person to create a soundscape that



Christiana Clark as Clov and Terry Bellamy as Hamm. Photo courtesy of Paula Keller.

enriches, shapes, and punctuates the action and emotional currents of the play. Heather Barringer's sound design was often reminiscent of vaudeville riffs or silent film effects: for instance, a slide whistle accompanied the sound of Nagg's hat being raised or drew attention to the closing of the ashbin lids. My companion found this distracting (we also happened to be sitting right by the source), but it provided an intriguing metatheatrical dimension, illuminating the performative quality already inherent in the script. At first, the sound effects merely accompanied action and provided a score underneath that we all accepted as outside the world of the play. But about halfway through, Hamm and Clov began responding to the sounds, turning to look at Barringer when they disagreed with her illustration of a move. This dramatic choice worked to heighten both the comic and tragic dimensions and radically shifted our view of the world of the play. Whereas earlier Hamm's need to keep dialogue going and his desire to perform seemed existential—a necessary illusion of believing that you're seen—suddenly there actually *was* someone there. They are not entirely alone after all. In fact, they are being watched by someone who is never named, has no spoken dialogue, yet comments on, translates, and even transforms their actions. As we filed out afterward, I imagined audiences—whether constrained in prison, institutionalized in a shelter or nursing home, or like us, seemingly free to roam as we please—wondering whom they're performing for, what forces they are responding to, what is watching and directing their daily repetitive actions and banal exchanges.

--Amy Muse



Happy Days at the Guthrie: Winnie and Willie Make Minnesota (N)Ice

When at the end of Richard Yates' novel *Revolutionary Road*—published the same year as Samuel Beckett's play *Happy Days* (1961)—the taciturn and put-upon Mr. Givings turns down his hearing aid to tune out the incessant blathering of the self-deluded and solipsistic Mrs. Givings, we

are given some recourse, ironically perhaps, for the tragic dissolution of the young Wheeler marriage. After all, if the Givings are an example of a life together long-endured, then who wouldn't feel perversely grateful to witness the Wheeler's marriage cut mercifully short? That the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis happened to stage *Happy Days* (February 14-March 8, 2009) at the very moment when Yates' National Book Award-winning novel was gathering renewed attention for its cinematic adaptation may be perfectly coincidental, but it's also perfectly apt. Love is in the air, to speak *in the old style*, along with the specificity of its awful flipside: loneliness, indifference, abandonment, entrapment. How better then to magnify this almighty affliction than for Winnie—nature's dupe or heroine—to tell her and Willie's story on Valentine's Day? And in Minnesota no less, a state where women widely bemoan the cold inaccessibility of their male counterparts, those tight-lipped, near-infarcted Norwegian bachelor farmers whose willful isolation on the backside of their seasonally snowed or sun-scorched mounds rivals that of poor Willie's. It is indeed a poorer joke Beckett surely would have appreciated.

Winnie's Sally Wingert and Willie's Richard Ooms, both veteran actors of the Twin Cities' theatre scene, have amassed between them more than a hundred production credits at the Guthrie Theatre alone; and in many of those productions they shared the stage together, developing over time a chemistry and ease, or, depending on the demand of their roles and director, an easily willed alienation. In the case of *Happy Days*, for example, what Wingert's Winnie and Ooms's Willie share—to the extent that they share anything besides the silencing mound between them—is less chemistry and ease than the rusted, ill-fitting resignation of the long-married (if not married in fact, then *in figure*, like Lucky leashed to Pozzo) and their indifferently received voicing unto the void. To this end, Wingert and Ooms, under Rob Melrose's direction, are brilliant in their dead-on, unchemical romance. Melrose notes in the program to *Happy Days* that he first witnessed this brilliancy some twenty years ago when the two actors appeared on stage together in the Guthrie Theatre's "innovative and imaginative production of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth*," which inspired him to become a director. Both actors are made to order for their respective parts in terms of appearance, with Wingert playfully, perhaps ruefully, confessing in a promotional video for *Happy Days* her physical aptitude for the task: "fifty, well preserved, blond for preference, plump." To be sure, the last detail is humbly overstated, though Wingert as big-bosomed Winnie wears her low bodice well. In contrast, Ooms looks every bit the aged ruin, a diminished speck of a man crawling Lear-like toward his own demise, poor Willie. In all his ripeness, he *is* Beckettian Man, of few words and crumbling.

Smartly staged in the Dowling Studio, the smallest and (at roughly 200 seats) the most intimate of the three performance spaces in the recently relocated Guthrie Theatre, *Happy Days* is also set to the letter, its prescribed scorched and grass-strewn mound looming behind a preshow scrim timed to transparency as the stage lights brighten to their most blazing. The scrim is not specified by Beckett himself,

but it is an inventive touch on behalf of both Melrose and set designer Michael Locher. It anticipates in material form at least one idea borne out by the play, that of language and its timeworn transparency, and what happens to us all when we are deprived of what Ibsen in *The Wild Duck* called “the vital lie.”

In his book *A Scream Goes Through the House*, Arnold Weinstein argues that Strindberg’s late play *The Ghost Sonata* (productions of which Beckett had seen several times) advances a theory “that language is always and ever a form of lying, with the corollary that people who know and live with one another turn ultimately silent, because they can no longer lie successfully, because each of them is so *transparent* to the other, by dint of time” [italics are mine]. What then is the significance of this increasingly transparent scrim but to inaugurate all that is barren in Beckett’s world, and to expose, as Winnie herself suffers exposure to the blazing sun, the nothing that is not there and—to follow still further the words of Wallace Stevens—the nothing that is? There is even more justification for the inclusion of the scrim when one considers Harold Pinter on the topic of language and transparency, which seems to refer uncannily to Winnie and Willie: “The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don’t hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, *anguished or mocking smoke screen* which keeps the other in its place. One way of looking at speech is to say it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness” [italics are mine].

In other words (for Strindberg, Pinter, and Beckett, there are always *other words* until, that is, there’s nothing at all), to better appreciate much of Beckett’s work—*Happy Days* in particular—one need only to listen attentively to neighboring couples (of the growling, indentured variety) in the audience just before the curtain rises. There’s often a banal, simmering resentment or badgering silence on behalf of one or the other reluctant playgoer whose time, he or she feels, would be better spent in *better company*, with one who is less grim, say, or less expectant; less chattering or less insular; less sincere, less sarcastic, less bitter; less ugly; or perhaps, and most commonly, less mute. The scrim then rises and, lo and behold, there they are—*there we are*—front and center and up to our elbows, or stuck head-first into whatever hole we’ve dug for ourselves. Perhaps in this way all of Modern Theatre stakes itself on the audience not ever knowing which way to turn. For Beckett knew well theatre’s capacity to be a funhouse mirror, to disorient and reflect unflatteringly those happy, *happy* couples who might, on a lark, brave a frigid February evening in Dublin or Paris or Minneapolis to take in a show to better celebrate their unwise union.

Apart from the scrim there was only one other detail I could see that was out of keeping with Melrose’s exactitude and strict fidelity to Beckett’s directions, and that concerns what appeared to be a 9mm semi-automatic pistol in place of a script-specified “revolver.” It’s not a case of anachronism but of connotation, and whether Beckett intended it or not (I’m betting on the former), a revolver carries with it a Russian roulette-like sense of contingency. It’s the one prop of the play that puts the hap in *Happy Days*.

--Doug Phillips

Beckett at the Spoleto Festival



Happy Days

Winnie: Adriana Asti

Willie: Yann de Graval

Director: Robert Wilson

Italian Translation: Carlo Fruttero

Assistant Director: Christoph Schlettz

Costumes and Make Up: Jacques Reynaud

Lighting: A. J. Weissbard

Sound: Peter Cerone and Emre Sevindik

Set: Ellen Hammer

Robert Wilson presented *Happy Days* and *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Spoleto Festival in June 2009. On Saturday, June 27, *Giorni felici* opened at the Caio Melisso, a tiny jewel of a theatre opening onto the main square in the centre of the medieval town of Spoleto.

The performance began with the dramatic sound of thunder and rain while, in the semi-darkness, a white curtain shook, rose and fell towards the audience, blown by wind from the stage. With a final bang and the lowering of the lights, the foamy curtains were sucked into the wings and in a sudden burst of light there was Winnie.

The audience was then faced with a startling setting: no trace of the “scorched grass” or any “gentle slopes,” nor the “very pompier trompe-l’oeil” of a plain on the horizon at the back. But the “maximum of simplicity and symmetry” there certainly was: Winnie erupts like moving magma, a blue iron doll, from a black mound of shattered, sharp, pointed asphalt in which she is buried up to her waist. This desert belongs to an urban context, far from anything even reminiscent of nature. The effect is that of a stylized, artificial volcano, emerging from a wasted concrete surface.

The colours (basic black and shades of blue), the white faces and hands of the characters and the cold lighting

all contributed to an overall atmosphere where pathos is banned and the temptation to despair is sanitized. Almost all stage props were black, umbrella included, and when placed around Winnie like a display of her treasure, they stuck to the steep surface of the mound as if magnetized.

Adriana Asti's delivery of Winnie's lines had a true sense of rhythm, creating the required balance between words and silences, boredom and anguish, kept laboriously and stubbornly at bay. This Winnie is simultaneously both Beckett's creature and a different character. She is not wearing the prescribed "low bodice" nor any pearl necklace, but rather a long-sleeved blue shirt (in fact a dress, as we discovered at curtain calls), though with a plunging neckline, exposing at times ample portions of cleavage. Her face is very white, perhaps clownishly so, with black-rimmed, wide, expressive eyes—at times sparkling with life, at times blank with dejection. Equally white are her hands and wrists, gloved in almost invisible tulle. Her hair is perfectly waved, like a synthetic yellow plastic wig. There is no trace of a hat.

This Winnie is a very strong character, only marginally touched by gloom, hopelessness or desolation. Misery, as pointed, piercing and sharp as the shattered blades surrounding her, seldom breaks through the surface. Her tone when rebuking Willie is mostly assertive, verging on the harsh—never sentimental. She slurs her prayers at the beginning of the play, making the process sound like clearly audible nonsense, with no intelligible "amen" and no mention of a deity, thus making the prayer less culturally rooted and perhaps to some more widely acceptable. Adriana Asti is not a sex-phobic character marked by the disturbing early experience mentioned in the episode of the child with dolly: she plays with her breasts quite comfortably, unaware or maybe uninterested in the obscenity of the act.

In this production of *Giorni felici*, despair is more of an intellectual experience than an emotional condition. The audience responded with evident relish to the jokes (practical and verbal), but were clearly not encouraged to empathise. This Winnie requires no compassion; she moves through her day with almost unfaltering determination, refusing with new strength and willpower to surrender. But she is not the querulous, almost frivolous woman we may be expecting and who has previously moved us to tears with her dissimulated or involuntary resilience. She is rather a steel marionette, a resourceful woman, determined to fight to the very end. Even in the second act, in which she is usually brimming with despair and insanity, here everything is kept firmly under control—so much so perhaps as to be less effective than in the first act.

Willie is a less anonymous character than the one we may have been accustomed to seeing. He responds more readily and with a curious, peculiarly estranging foreign accent. In this production Willie is also evidently much younger than Winnie, implicitly emphasizing the predominance of the female over the weaker, more ineffectual male character. His final appearance on stage is a long, painstaking attempt to reach Winnie. His thin and decayed body, with a red sore visible on his bald head, is in strong contrast with the neat figure of the Winnie's yellow and white head.

The closing song, usually so moving, is here a sharp,

unexpected and almost fierce *coup-de-theatre*. Like a severe queen commanding the stage from her sharp-toothed throne, towering over her life-long companion, the audience, and even her own decaying life, Winnie salutes and dismisses us with a final challenge, the ultimate refusal to be defeated.

--Rossana Sebellin

Krapp's Last Tape



Krapp: Robert Wilson

Director: Robert Wilson

Assistant Directors: Sue Jane Stoker and Thaiz Bozano

Set and Costumes: Yashi Tabassomi

Lighting: A. J. Weissbard and Xavier Baron

Sound : Peter Cerone and Jesse Ash

On June 28 at the Teatro Caio Melisso, Robert Wilson premiered his *Krapp's Last Tape*, in English (with Italian over-titles), featuring himself as Krapp. As often happens with performances of Beckett staged over the last few years, questions of fidelity are raised by this production. Stan Gontarski brilliantly discusses the challenge of fidelity to Beckett in the 21st century in an upcoming essay (soon available online), and many including myself have also contributed to the discussion. Most of us accept that, after being performed to perfection under his own direction and that of several contemporaries, Beckett's drama can no longer be merely faithfully repeated. A *new* performance must somehow be sought, balancing creative gains against losses.

Certainly, what we have here is a far cry from what we normally expect of Krapp and his desolate room. Obviously no red nose (but this was discarded long ago), no emaciated angry face like John Hurt's or Pinter's, no "rusty trousers," no "grimy" shirt, no dirty white boots. For the Royal Court's most recent *Krapp*, the room was messy and decaying, with ramshackle, collapsing and rusting bookshelves, a scattering of battered leather-bound books and files: an apotheosis of old age and disorder, with an obviously ill 76 year-old

Pinter-Krapp in a wheelchair. Wilson-Krapp's setting, by contrast, is immaculate: rows and rows of perfectly designed shelves with perfectly arranged files, all exactly the same; the room all shades of grey. And Wilson's Krapp is the neatest I have ever seen: very white painted face, hair and eyebrows almost as lacquered and carefully drawn as on the face of a matrioska, black on white with the sudden cleavage of the red mouth opening to break the mask, and the extremely precise movements of a dancer.

The performance starts with a sudden deafening clap of thunder, and about 15 minutes pass with Krapp sitting still on stage, a beam of white light on his face, listening to heavy rain. The lighting and colours are very cold: everything black, grey and white, except his red mouth, his red socks and the yellow banana, which is held dangling obscenely from his mouth before being savoured and gulped down with due relish. When Wilson starts delivering the text, he punctuates the words with loud mechanical sounds, accompanied by elegant non-naturalistic movements of his hand. Personally I found it off-putting that the same abstract movements of the hand were employed by the very different body of Adriana Asti performing Winnie. Wilson's hands snap open aslant when banishing a thought or refusing a memory. Equally unrealistic are some of the sounds he himself produces from time to time, troubling the flow of Beckett's words: a strangled cry, almost the note of a trumpet; a shrill piercing laugh, mirthless and mechanical, accompanying or opposing the laugh of the recorded younger Krapp with the mad cackle of a demented clown. The word "spool" is relished as it should be, though distorted almost beyond recognition.

This Krapp is of an undefinable age, but certainly he is not the human relic we have been accustomed to encountering. He does not move "laborious[ly]," but with the surprisingly elegant, extremely supple movements of a dancer, soliciting memorable laughter at one point in the performance. Though the pathos of lost memories is still captured in this new form, Wilson's Krapp is certainly a dehumanized, a kind of Craigian Übermarionette. The strained processes of memory, which in the text juxtapose 39 year-old Krapp's misguided enthusiasm against the old man's disillusionment, are further externalized and made more abstract.

The Spoleto audience reacted strongly with rapt attention to the performance, mirroring my own response. This is in many ways a heretical Krapp, and some of us certainly missed the portrayal of decaying humanity—the mournful, moving parable of failure—which is conventionally the core of the text. Here empathy is neither solicited nor expected. Like many of Beckett's characters the Krapp we have been accustomed to is a clown, but a suffering clown who tells us much about the human condition. Wilson's Krapp is a mechanism, a surprisingly inhuman mad marionette with whom no identification or sympathy is required. Nonetheless, this was certainly a memorable performance which adds a new dimension to the many exciting Krapps we have seen over the past decades.

--Daniela Guardamagna

Spectral Beckett, Paris 2009

The aim of this colloquium—which took place in Paris at the Irish Cultural Centre and Paris VII-Denis Diderot on the 2nd and 3rd of April 2009—was to launch the new online journal *Limit(e) Beckett*. The journal was inspired by a desire to bring together Anglophone and Francophone criticism in the manner of a limit (from the Latin *limes*, a borderline between fields and a passageway), and to open a space for dialogue where various territories, both linguistic and cultural, could be explored. To this end, the editorial board—Julia Siboni, Gabriela Garcia-Hubard, Lea Simoneri, Guillaume Gesvret, Alys Moody and myself—set up an advisory council made up of eminent Beckett scholars from the international scene, who have agreed to lend their support the project: Linda Ben-Zvi, Mary Bryden, Bruno Clément, Gabriele Frasca, Andrew Gibson, Evelyne Grossman, Denis Guénoun, Sjeff Houppermans, Carla Locatelli, Angela Moorjani, Mark Nixon, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Dirk Van Hulle—many of whom gave papers at the event.

True to its aims, the colloquium was bilingual, and the subject of the spectral was chosen as the theme of the event for the number of possible readings it afforded. Thus on the Thursday there were *Echos historiques / Historical Echos*, *Spectres philosophiques / Philosophical Spectres*, *Vie et mort / Life and Death*, *Passages*; and on the Friday, *Troubles*, *Evanescence*, *Transformations*, and *Revenants*. The final day was rounded off with a *Soirée Spectres plastiques / Spectral Arts Evening* in which the focus was on Beckett and contemporary arts—drawing out the historical origin of the word "specter" in the closely related term "spectrum": image or apparition.

Two papers which showed the rich variety of "specters" on offer were Andrew Gibson's "Historical Spectres: *The Trilogy* and France 1939-49" and Dirk Van Hulle's "The Ineffable Worst—and Worse: Beckett Writing *Worstward Ho*." Gibson's paper was an expansion of part of his chapter on Vichy France (1939-1944) in his forthcoming biography of Beckett (*Samuel Beckett: A Critical Life*), but taking into account secondary texts of which Gibson had only recently become aware. The book attempts to respect Beckett's life-hating distrust of biography and to shrink his life "to a thin trickle between rebarbative historical circumstances and creative work." As such, it is a companion piece to Gibson's 2006 work, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*, albeit with the focus more on the remainder than on the event. The paper was very much a work in progress—indeed, Gibson presented a formidable reading list, before going on to admit that he had yet to read most of the works on it! Much of this literature formed part of the "Paxtonian revolution" and its history of forties France, associated with Robert O. Paxton, Henri Rousso, Roderick Kedward, Dominique Veillon, Jean-Pierre Azéma and others, and their work of demystification and radical hermeneutics of suspicion. Gibson had already dug up some fascinating instances of contemporary phrases appearing in the *Trilogy* which echo the

vocabulary of Vichy's call for the moral renewal of France. He gave three examples: Molloy's talk of an *épuration*, his reference to the judgment of history, and his description of the encounter with the *charbonnier*. The allusions were truly spectral, found in the darkest corners of the *Trilogy* and easily overlooked—indeed consistently overlooked by Beckett's scholars thus far—and all were subjected to Beckett's corrosive skepticism. But so, too, Gibson argued, was the vocabulary of Gaullist and post-Liberation France with its own concern with cleansing. Sadly, Gibson announced that this will be his last work on Beckett.

Dirk Van Hulle challenged the critical commonplace that Beckett's work was anti-encyclopedic, while Joyce's was encyclopedic, pointing out that Joyce often applied his knowledge ironically, and that even the sparsest late Beckett works are saturated with intertextual references—the spectres of erudition. Beckett's "poetics of ignorance," Van Hulle argues, is only possible because Beckett was so erudite. The paper demonstrated the genesis of *Worstward Ho* in Beckett's notebooks, from passages copied out of *King Lear*—particularly Gloucester moaning "I have no way"—to the short texts "The Way" and "Ceiling," to *Worstward Ho* itself, which Van Hulle suggests owes its title and content to Edgar's outburst in *King Lear*: "O gods! Who is't can say, 'I am at the worst?' (...) And worse I may be yet; the worst is not, So long as we can say, 'This is the worst.'" This turns out to be impossible, for as long as you can still say or write "this is the worst," things can always get worse. Van Hulle demonstrated how this need to reach the worst and thus get things over and done with is not only the narrator's struggle in *Worstward Ho*, but was also Beckett's. By looking at the consecutive versions of the text, he shows Beckett's difficulties with the absoluteness of the superlative "worst": different versions waver between "For want of worser worse" and "For want of worser worst." A different kind of search characterizes the later texts, where allusions to, for example, Shakespeare's sonnets, are incomplete, with words or whole lines forgotten. Van Hulle argued brilliantly that the resultant omissions place an onus on Beckett's characters to either continue looking for the last lost word—the worst worst?—in the hope that it will clarify things, or else to give the present situation the benefit of the doubt: that is the core of the Beckettian hesitation—and the spectral—for Van Hulle.

Other noteworthy papers were those of Dr. Derval Tubridy on *Breath* and the sublime, which argued that Beckett's concern with something beyond language extends to an interest in something beyond image—the spectral beyond the spectrum?—and Angela Moorjani's fascinating presentation on Beckett's debt to Jules Renard. The latter piece functioned in some ways a companion piece to Gibson's in that it aimed to situate Beckett not within the historic French context, but the literary. Also noteworthy was the caliber of the papers presented by the editorial board of *Limit(e) Beckett*: Alys Moody's on hunger, Gabriela Garcia-Hubard's on noise, Lea Simoneri's on the influence of radio on *How It Is*, Julia Siboni on specters of Auschwitz, and Guillaume Gesvret on scale in Beckett's work.

The evening of the first day culminated in an extremely rare screening of a 1963 French language film version of

Tous ceux qui tombent by Michel Miteuni and starring Alice Supritch and Guy Tréjean. There was some debate as to whether Beckett had authorized the production, but given his famous refusal to allow the play to be staged, this is highly unlikely. As he said, the play's effect depended on "the whole thing's coming out of the dark." And sure enough the "joke" in Mrs. Rooney's running commentary on the scenery—"a ruinous old house," "the track in the far distance," "that lovely laburnum again"—falls flat when we can actually see the things she describes, just as her existence as physical body rather than in radio waves (if not "In atoms!"), weakens the effect of lines such as, "Don't mind me ... Don't take any notice of me. *I do not exist*. The fact is well known." Nevertheless, the film provides an interesting twist on the play's *mise-en-scène*. If the radio version's deliberate tinniness of sound and studio echo in recording undermine its claim to stage a "real" place, making it clear that the three-dimensionality of the place represented, with all its local color, is merely the result of the three-dimensionality of the BBC's Shepherd's Bush studio, the film likewise emphasizes its own fakeness where place is concerned: the architecture is clearly French, as is the locomotive which pulls Mr. Rooney's train, yet the station name board reads "Boghill." Like the play, the film never lets us forget that that the places of Beckett's most location-specific drama are spectral. The film was an unusual and enjoyable end to the day's proceedings, and indeed had those who managed to lay aside their purist instincts rolling around in the aisles.

Seating was slightly limited at the Irish Cultural Centre and in the sessions on the first morning there was standing room only. However, for the afternoon panels a student strike proved a greater draw and the audience was reduced to largely Beckett specialists and the speakers. Nevertheless, there were lively debates, and as always it was fascinating to witness the number of perspectives being brought to bear on each paper in the debates afterwards. It was a shame then that the question session after the *Spectres philosophiques* / *Philosophical Spectres* panel, in which Anthony Cordingley and myself spoke, was severely curtailed when a last-minute change had to be made to the roster to allow Bruno Clément to speak—despite the fact that he had previously declined an invitation to do so. This meant that two young scholars were denied the rare opportunity to field questions from such a diverse audience.

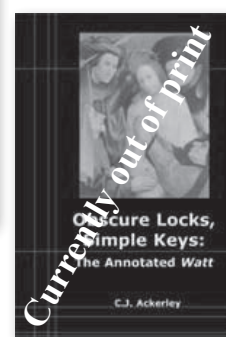
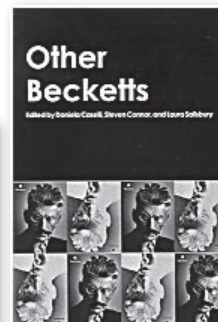
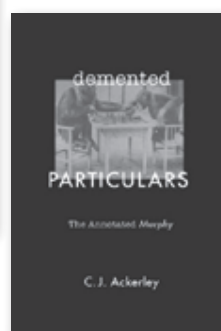
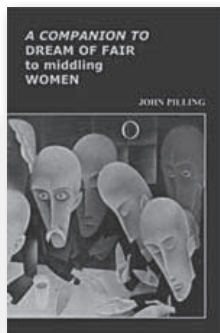
One other slight criticism is of the bilingual format: what tended to happen was that Anglophone delegates took over the question sessions after the English-language papers, while the Francophones took over those in their language. There was thus little (public) dialogue or exploration of the *limit* between Anglophone and Francophone criticism. Nevertheless, the colloquium was a rewarding two days, and for those who missed it, at least one issue of the *Limit(e) Beckett* is to be dedicated to publishing the papers. In the meantime, the zero issue of the journal will be published online this fall.

-- David Addyman

Journal of Beckett Studies Books

Library Order Form

Please pass on your recommendations to Library Acquisitions



There is a \$6 shipping fee for domestic orders, and \$12 fee for international orders.

Fill out form below and send to:

Journal of Beckett Studies Books
Department of English
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-1580

Please make checks payable to:
Journal of Beckett Studies Books



- ☐ Transnational Beckett (\$40)
- ☐ Beckett the European (\$40)
- ☐ A Companion to *Dream of Fair to middling Women* (\$40)
- ☐ Demented Particulars: The Annotated *Murphy* (\$40)
- ☐ Other Becketts (\$40)
- ☐ ~~Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt (\$40)~~

Indicate to the left of each title how many copies you are ordering.

Institution: _____

Address: _____

Country (if not U.S.): _____

E-mail: _____

BOOK REVIEWS

Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, eds. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 782pp. \$50; £30.

The first volume of Beckett's letters is a revelation, and one can only hope that succeeding volumes are illuminating to the same degree. It would, however, perhaps be better to speak of a muted revelation, in that a scholar like Seán Kennedy will need to dig out all the relevant implications. This publication is significant enough to inaugurate a new phase in Beckett studies—certainly in the study of early Beckett. One would be quite mistaken in supposing that there is little that is truly new here, or that we did not know already. In effect, however piecemeal, the letters provide us with a 700-page narrative of the growth and formation of the young adult consciousness of one of the great minds of the last century. The fact of us having a major narrative is very important. Nor would one be right to think that the insights are largely incidental: now we know that Beckett could be critical of Joyce; that he initially had distinct misgivings about *Du côté de chez Swann*, comparing its weaknesses with Macaulay's and Moore's; that he pitched his version of Johnson [his "Johnson blasphemy" (569)] specifically against the orthodox English one; that he clearly felt he had no religious bent ["I...seem never to have had the least faculty or disposition for the supernatural" (257)]; and so on. What emerges, here, slowly but ungainsayably, are the lineaments of the first phase of the psychic disaster Beckett had to endure. Together with the factual bedrock that Knowlson and Cronin have supplied, and Beckett's early writings, these letters leave different readers in a position to arrive at an informed judgment as to who he was and what he was about in the early stage of his career.

The predicament of the young Beckett at last seems clear: it was the long and arduous struggle involved in bidding farewell to Anglo-Ireland. This has hitherto been focused on his relations with his mother, and they are indeed important. But his relations with his mother also always involved questions of culture, as in the magnificent, sad letter of 6 October 1937 to McGreevy, when he rounds on her for "wanting me to behave in a way agreeable to her in her October of alphabetic gentility" (552); though he does so only to lapse into hapless compassion again in Paris: "I feel sorry for her often to the point of tears" (625). In any case, May does not loom particularly large in the letters: what is more remarkable is how far the ambivalences in Beckett's responses to her thread through his responses to Anglo-Irish culture as a whole, and to the Anglo-Irish he knew: Rudmose-Brown, Lennox Robinson, the Duncans, Hone, Hester Dowden, Thompson, Ussher, Leventhal (Jew-

ish, but progressively moving up in the establishment), Reavey (not so much Anglo-Irish, perhaps, as Irish and Anglo-). Again and again, Beckett's responses are the same or similar: he needs to escape a culture in its twilight years, bereft of the power that had underwritten it. He needs to get beyond his compeers, in the interests of a project he can as yet but dimly glimpse. But he finds this extremely difficult, not just because of his well-documented capacity for personal affection or his uncertainty as to whether he can conceivably belong anywhere else, but also because it means abandoning a whole set of implicitly gratifying attitudes. These attitudes were implicated in what Niall Rudd called the "unstated system of 'yes's' and 'no's'" that separated the Houyhnhnms from the Yahoos.

Unsurprisingly, the problem is above all one of language, and pleasure in language. From Burke to Yeats, Anglo-Ireland had been addicted to grandiosity. Joyce had spectacularly and abruptly destroyed this tradition, not least in the second half of *Ulysses*, where grand English and Anglo-Irish voices are relentlessly satirized. Beckett likewise knew that he must take a different course. At length, he too would understand that he must reject the voice of mastery itself. But that was not immediately evident to him. What the *Letters* allow us directly to grasp is how far the prose *agons* of *More Pricks* and *Dream* are not just Belacqua's, but were integral to the young Beckett. The exquisiteness of the young man's style—the *recherché* vocabulary, the ostentatious scatterings of other languages, the deliberate obliquities and obscurities—can be almost wincingly precious, and repeatedly conveys a sense of inanition. But the point is that, even whilst he could be casually dismissive of a moribund rhetoric that at best said "nothing very beautifully," as in the case of Yeats (341), Beckett himself was still aiming "high," if in a different mode, one suspended somewhere between Trinity College and modernism. He needed a demotic; but in Ireland, the demotic belonged to Joyce's class, not Beckett's, and was not available to him. There is pathos to the young Beckett's occasional lapses into "mockney." In this context, the letter to McGreevy on 10 March 1935 seems to indicate a critical moment. Here Beckett finally rounds on his own attachment to the "pathology" of "the superior man" and the "feeling of arrogant otherness" (258). This in turn points directly towards his rejection, at one and the same time, of "formal English" and "the imperturbability of a gentleman" in the well-known letter of 9 July 1937 to Axel Kaun, which takes on a whole new range of meanings in the context of this volume. In the distance, too, one can see a writer who will absorb a French demotic, not least from Céline.

Crucially, Beckett dates his "pathology" precisely from his entry into Trinity. Trinity was indeed decisive for him, in what it gave, but also in what it failed to give. He would therefore have to repudiate it. There is much about this

BOOK REVIEWS

that we don't yet understand. We badly need a trenchant, clear-eyed, tough-minded account of the Trinity College of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century that allows us to contextualize Beckett appropriately within it and is not just content with indulgent talk of "Ruddy." Whatever our views of the sanctification of Beckett, we must not consent to the sanitization of his historical environments, which were often at the very least distinctly unsavoury, or we risk losing touch with him. Trinity had been a stronghold of "scientific" racism. Lord Dunraven had admitted that its walls were "saturated" with "racial distinctions." It had boasted an Anthropometric Laboratory of Ireland, whence researchers issued forth to the "ethnic islands" (the Aran Islands) to measure heads and determine "racial characters." For decades, it had ferociously if often secretly worked to block the cause of educational equality (for Catholics) in Ireland. One of its greatest luminaries had cited *Ulysses* as proof that it was a mistake to have a university for the "aborigines" of the island, the "corner boys who spit in the Liffey." It was, historically, a deeply tainted institution. However obliquely, the young Beckett's "pathology" was an infection from that taint. There is another very important moment in a letter Beckett writes to Hone on 3 July 1937 in which he records Rudmose-Brown's view of South Africa—"the fruit makes up for the Kaffirs"—only to add, quietly, "I should have reversed that proposition myself" (508). This is in its way as indicative as the letter to Kaun, which follows just six days later.

With all the above in mind, I have one misgiving about this edition. The apparatus is very ample and very informative, often in useful ways. The presentation is clear, the book beautiful, and it is extremely good to have it. Judged by the standards of the great recent editions of some of the work of Irish writers, however—the superb Oxford edition of Yeats's letters, Kevin Barry's edition of Joyce's critical writings—this one falls a little short. It does so, above all, in a certain lack of inwardness or intimacy with the Irish context. Without that, we miss some important aspects of the young Beckett. Hence, too, a sense of disproportion on occasions: on the one hand, Francis Stuart gets a long paragraph which tells the story of his life. On the other hand, the specifics of McGreevy's political position on Ireland in the late thirties, which would allow us accurately to gauge Beckett's engagement with or, rather, disengagement from it in the letter of 31 January 1938, are largely missing from the notes.

Beneath this kind of editorial practice lies the residue of a familiar set of assumptions about how to read an abstract modernist. This may be more worrying with the next volume. For it is much easier to ignore specificities in Beckett's relation to the France of Vichy, de Gaulle and the early years of the Fourth Republic than it is in the case of Ireland, when the complexity of the French context is actually rather more byzantine even than that of the Irish

one. Already, towards the end of the first volume, for example, Beckett is referring familiarly to Nizan and Sartre together. He had clearly at least been aware of them from his time at the École Normale (where they were known as Nitre and Sarzan) not least through Péron, who had been a schoolfriend and knew them very well. In the extremely politicized world of France in the 1940s, the possibility of nuance in such references—and the exact point to the nuances—may require some delicate attention. Ideally, like Yeats's letters, Beckett's would be edited by a team of scholars with different kinds of expertise, not least, historical, and focused on different volumes. In the real world, however, we owe Fehsenfeld and Overbeck a major debt of gratitude.

--Andrew Gibson

Kevin Branigan. *Radio Beckett: Musicality in the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008. 268pp. \$68.95; £33.

Thirty-two years is a long time by any reckoning, and the shadow cast by Clas Zilliacus' *Beckett and Broadcasting* (1976) has steadily grown during the past few decades. As the only monograph on the radio plays, it has more or less constituted this corner of Beckett studies, which by definition makes Kevin Branigan's book a brave and significant event. The analytical perspective promised by *Radio Beckett's* subtitle is, furthermore, very timely in the light of the current critical attention being paid to the intersection between Beckett and music. Indeed, the most interesting recent articles on the radio plays have been of a musicological nature, so a whole book dedicated to such a specific subject ought by rights to make a major contribution to Beckett criticism. As a scholar of the radio plays—though not their musicality—I only wish that this study had met its challenges better.

A sense of the "impotence" of language, a disintegrating faith in its ability to signify, glimpses of a meaning-shaped void lying behind words, and the counterproductive reliance on those very words to express the inexpressible...these are among the uncontested cornerstones of Beckett's work. Moving from a Mauthnerian view of an imperfect language conveying incomplete reality through faulty senses, Branigan draws on the Platonic and Schopenhauerian models of ideal and pure music, which allow access to the ineffable reality lying beyond the senses. Music—used in *Radio Beckett* as a catch-all term that includes screams, sighs and silences—offers an alternative, truer means of expression, a release from the imperfect linguistic cage in which we are otherwise imprisoned. The increasing dominance of this "music" in the radio plays

BOOK REVIEWS

is taken as a sign of Beckett's linear move towards a rejection of language. There are a number of problems with Branigan's polarised account, in which the verbal is pitted against the non-verbal. Aside from the fact that Beckett did not, of course, abandon words, this binary position overlooks the centrality of non-verbal expression in our every communicative venture, and ignores the strength of a play like *Words and Music*, in which the incompatibility of words and music, coupled with their effort and need to understand each other, is central. Furthermore, Branigan's argument rests on a transcendental model of music that is not necessarily supported by Beckett's work. Catherine Laws, for instance, has argued persuasively against such an idealised, synthesised and reductive account of music, which "can never reflect the true fragmentation of reality" (*SBT/A* 9, 303).

Branigan has fine points to make about the creative role of the listener, the collaborative nature of communication, and the productive nature of creative misreading—which in this context concerns composers' reactions to Beckett's texts—and it would have made for a far more significant book had these ideas taken centre stage, instead of being merely mentioned in passing. Far too much space is, instead, given over to the links with Mauthner, Schubert, Noh drama, the BBC and so on, links that have been better traced, with greater nuance and detail, by other scholars. More damagingly, when *Radio Beckett's* central thesis is finally articulated—halfway through the book—its various points have been made so often, in so piecemeal and circular a fashion, yet without gaining further complexity, that any power it may possess has been lost. A nadir is reached when the same Philip Glass quote is used to make the same point on five separate occasions, a simple argument rendered threadbare through repetition.

Crucially, *Radio Beckett* is surprisingly unconcerned with defining what it means by "musicality." There is much to be said about the Cagean idea that music is "found in all sounds," as there is for the longstanding notion that it provokes intuitive (as opposed to intellectual) reactions, but the reader will have to look elsewhere for those discussions: here, these sweeping statements are swallowed whole. In the same way, Branigan writes of the "regular four-in-the-bar rhythm of footsteps" in *All That Fall* as though this were a natural feature of the play rather than the judgment of the BBC producer Donald McWhinnie, whose interpretation has subsequently been critiqued by Everett Frost. Equally problematically, the same generalisations are applied to scores composed for the plays. "Mihalovici's music [for *Cascando*] is dramatic," we are told, "yet it would appear that it is not meant to mirror the themes which are mentioned by Voice" (220). No analysis of Mihalovici's music follows, leaving us none the wiser as to the extent of its interaction with the words. Indeed, music is presented throughout *Radio Beckett* as an undif-

ferentiated idea, a position that sidelines the actual music of the plays, the actual compositions that complete those plays structurally by concretising the conceptual blanks of the text.

More often than not, Branigan fails to substantiate his claims, whether these concern what is "often observed" about Beckett's work—by whom?—or more radical assertions such that "emotional engagement [is] discouraged in the Western musical tradition" (208). Likewise, complex issues are regularly reduced to unequivocal truths; for instance, "[T]he nature and purpose of language appear self-evident to most of us" (132), and therefore, it seems, require no further discussion. Likewise, the notion that *All That Fall* may be "a profound commentary on language's—and music's—fall from grace during the Second World War" (139) is literally left at that, this staggering claim neither contextualised nor shown in the play. On the other hand, it is often hard to see the rationale for some lines of investigation. "How sentimental should musical accompaniment be?" (185) Branigan asks of *Words and Music*, as though this could be measured, before proposing that Beckett "may have naively considered [the term 'sentimental'] transparent" and thus not explained things clearly enough. This suggestion—which is imaginative at best, patronising at worst—ignores the inherent indeterminacy and deliberate universality of the play's musical instructions, which both invite interpretation and resist being finally pinned down.

Finally, a wearisome slipshodness comes to characterise the entire book. Calling the *Pastoral* Symphony Beethoven's Eighth is perhaps unfortunate; less acceptable are the repeated references to Bogtown (for *All That Fall's* Boghill) or to SB and GD as the figures of the *Three Dialogues*. While this last reflects Branigan's unquestioning acceptance of critical commonplaces—that B and G are Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit—it is a mere surface-level irritant compared to the factual inaccuracies. Branigan writes, for instance, of "*The Lied*, 'Death and the Maiden', which is heard at the beginning and end" of *All That Fall* (83), but the play in fact does not specify whether we hear the Lied or the Quartet of the same name, leaving the reference fittingly ambiguous. Branigan also argues that Beckett worked in "close collaboration" with Marcel Mihalovici and John Beckett, which in the former case is debatable, and in the latter is simply not true.

"[C]riticism of Beckett's work often reveals more about the critic than about the material" (132), and the truth of Branigan's insight is, unhappily, borne out by his book.

--Brynhildur Boyce

BOOK REVIEWS

Garin Dowd. *Abstract Machines: Samuel Beckett and Philosophy after Deleuze and Guattari*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 319pp. \$86; £45.71.

This is a challenging book, and it is likely that many will resist taking up the challenges it poses. It is also a serious work, and, in the end, it offers important insights that should be taken into account when considering how we might read Beckett.

The title emphasises the word “after” with regard to Deleuze and Guattari, drawing attention to a key strategy within the work. It is not attempting simply to read Beckett through Deleuze and Guattari by, say, drawing concepts from their works which might be seen to be exemplified in Beckett’s works. Rather, it is reading Beckett both “in the manner of” Deleuze and Guattari and in the wake of their ideas about how philosophy and literature interact (which Dowd compares to the encounter between the narrator and Watt in Beckett’s *Watt*). In doing this Dowd challenges how we conceive of the relation between literature and philosophy in general, and Beckett and philosophy in particular.

The nature of the relation between Beckett and philosophy, while usually being acknowledged as being somehow important to his works, has always been contentious within the field and remains so now. In fact it might be claimed that the nature of the relationship has come under renewed scrutiny because of the wave of new genetic criticism within the field, which has corresponded with the release of new material (notes taken by Beckett on his readings in the 1930s in particular). Followers of the new genetic criticism, who are among the most distinguished and important of the new generation of Beckett scholars, have at times seemed to want to argue (though with some hesitation) that we cannot talk about Beckett and any given philosopher (or writer of any other kind) if we cannot produce clear evidence that proves that Beckett both read this philosopher, and signed some sort of an affidavit indicating the manner in which he would make use of that philosopher. Of course, I exaggerate. Still, you see what I mean. Any number of responses could be made to this. While Garin Dowd does not explicitly set out to engage with these positions, he nevertheless does offer one of the more interesting responses to them.

Dowd’s book helps us to understand that what is important about Beckett’s relationship with philosophy is not so much what Beckett did with those philosophers he did read or those he did not read (how he used philosophy or was influenced by it); but rather what Beckett’s works have done to philosophy itself. This idea is most forcefully developed in Chapter Five, which concerns *Worstward Ho*, Deleuze and Phenomenology, but which also spends a good deal of time considering Alain Badiou’s responses to

Beckett. Although Dowd does not refer to him in this part of his book, Dowd’s readings extend, in important and illuminating ways, some of the insights briefly developed a few years back by Bruno Clément in his essay, “What the Philosophers Do With Samuel Beckett” (*Beckett after Beckett*, Florida UP, 2006). Here Clément contends that, on the one hand, Beckett’s works are so powerful that they cause readers to ventriloquise them, or take on the forms that they themselves develop and deploy, and on the other, that philosophers respond to this in their readings of Beckett by attempting to make Beckett over into their own image. In his readings of Badiou, Dowd shows how these two tendencies can in fact merge, so that even a philosopher with an iron clad system (such as Badiou) can be, in his encounters with Beckett, distorted by Beckett, altered in interesting ways through the contact.

It is not so much what philosophers do with Beckett, then, and the anxiety this inspires in those who believe that Beckett is being perverted through certain readings which pair him with philosophy; rather, it is now a matter of trying to come to terms with the possibility that Beckett’s works can and do have a real effect on philosophy. There are two important outcomes from this approach. Firstly, we begin to see why it might be useful to pair Beckett with this or that system, even when there are no demonstrable links between Beckett and these systems: it is useful because it allows for ways of testing or contesting those systems; reading them differently and even challenging their conclusions (as Dowd attempts on a number of occasions in this book). Secondly, we gain further insight into Beckett’s legacy, which affects not only writers, performance practitioners, artists, and musicians, but also philosophers and philosophical practice (insofar as those traditions take artistic expression seriously).

It is here that the idea of the “Abstract Machine” comes into play. The term is taken from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. For our purposes here, to simplify things a good deal, it might be loosely defined as involving the process of creation itself (in writing) which links and affirms the singular and the multiple (or to use terms Dowd avoids, the particular and general). This in turn allows an abstracted view (for example, the Beckett protagonists who seem to be removed from time and space) to speak both from outside and to particular experience. The “Abstract Machine” is the process of creation that brings into being the conditions of possibility for further creation. Deleuze and Guattari see, in Beckett’s writing, a philosophical tendency (he is half a philosopher, on the borderline between literature and philosophy), which, through its creations, distorts and shifts the terrain of philosophical investigation. The idea of the self, for example, which has always been subject to philosophical speculation and investigation, is an idea which Beckett’s works have themselves rigorously investigated in ways which cause us to inter-

BOOK REVIEWS

rogate anew those philosophical conceptions of self.

In many ways, then, Dowd's book is an impressive achievement. Among other things he offers perhaps the most in depth analysis to date of the ways in which Beckett studies have attempted to come to terms with Beckett's relationship with philosophy: displaying in the process his own impressive grasp of the field and of the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Leibniz, Badiou and others. In the process he offers readings (such as his extended discussion of Leibniz), which go further than previous works in addressing their subjects.

There will be many readers, however, who will find this book pitiless in its style. Dowd works "after" Deleuze and Guattari, and thereby requires his readers to find ways of understanding, rather than clearly leading them, and this is certainly not a book for the complete novice: it more or less requires some prior knowledge of much of the subject matter. So too, at times the readings of Beckett recede behind the philosophical debates Dowd considers. Still, there *are* important new readings here. While this is a challenging work, then, it is a challenge that readers who have an interest in Beckett and Continental philosophy, in particular, will find worth taking.

-- Anthony Uhlmann



Carl Köhler Exhibit

An exhibit featuring the work of Swedish visual artist Carl Köhler (1919-2006) is touring the United States and Canada. Included among the artist's work is a portrait of Samuel Beckett. The exhibit is on display this fall at Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C. In January it moves to the Robarts Library at the University of Toronto.

For more information, consult www.carlkohler.se

Beckett Sessions at 2009 MLA Convention

Tuesday, 29 December

486. Theatre After Beckett (Sponsored by the Samuel Beckett Society)

1:45–3:00 p.m., Philadelphia Marriott

Presiding: Richard Begam, University of Wisconsin, Madison

1. "Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* after *Not I*," Martin Harries, New York University
2. "Beckett in Crisis," Nicholas Allen, National University of Ireland, Galway
3. "Lost Ones and Haunting Ghosts: Beckett and Shepard," Katherine Weiss, East Tennessee State University

Monday, 28 December

166. Beckett and Degeneration

10:15–11:30 a.m., Philadelphia Marriott

Moderator: Michael Rubenstein (Univ. of California, Berkeley)

1. "Beckett, Nordau, and the Critique of Humanism," Patrick W. Bixby (Arizona State Univ.)

2. "Degeneration and the Ends of Ascendancy in Beckett's *Watt* Notebooks," Seán D. C. Kennedy (Saint Mary's Univ., NS)

3. "Exceptional Degenerates and Irish Aryans: History, Catastrophe, and Aesthetics in Beckett's *Malone Dies*," James McNaughton (Univ. of Alabama)

Wednesday, 30 December

679. The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett (Sponsored by the Samuel Beckett Society)

12:00–1:15 p.m., 30 December, Philadelphia Marriott

Moderator: Graley Herren (Xavier Univ., Cincinnati)

1. "Beckett's Irish Habitus," Seán D. C. Kennedy (Saint Mary's Univ., NS)
2. "Editing the Letters of Samuel Beckett," Martha Dow Fehsenfeld (Emory University) and Lois More Overbeck (Emory University)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

David Addyman received his Ph.D. from Royal Holloway, University of London, with a thesis on "Samuel Beckett and the Treatment of Place."

Linda Ben-Zvi is former President of the Beckett Society and heads the Beckett Working Group of IFTR.

Brynhildur Boyce is a doctoral student at Goldsmiths, University of London writing a thesis on Beckett and Radio. In 2009 she won the the British Association for Irish Studies Postgraduate Essay Prize for her essay "Pismires and Protestants: the 'lingering dissolution' of Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall*."

Jessica Brater is a doctoral student in the Theatre Studies program at the CUNY Graduate Center. She is also the founding Artistic Director of Polybe + Seats, a Brooklyn-based experimental theater company (www.polybeandseats.org).

Julie Campbell is Lecturer in Literature and Drama at the University of Southampton, UK. She has published widely, in books and scholarly journals, on Beckett's fiction and drama. Her essay on Beckett and Paul Auster was recently published in *Beckett at 100: Revolving It All* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

Tom Cousineau is Professor of English at Washington College in Maryland, where he teaches literary modernism. He is now writing a book, under contract with the Dalkey Archive Press, on the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa's modernist epic, *The Book of Disquiet*.

Andrew Gibson is Research Professor of Modern Literature and Theory at Royal Holloway, University of London. In 2008 he served as Carole and Gordon Segal Professor of Irish Literature at Northwestern University in Evanston, Chicago. From 2003 to 2005 he was a Leverhulme Research Fellow. His most recent books include *Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics and Aesthetics in 'Ulysses'* (Oxford University Press, 2002; paperback, 2005), *James Joyce: A Critical Life* (Reaktion, 2006), *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Daniela Guardamagna is Professor of English Literature at the University of Rome "Tor Vergata." Her main areas of research are Jacobean drama, contemporary drama (Beckett in particular), utopias and dystopias. She has translated for both cinema and theatre, and has adapted the BBC versions of *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* for Italian television (RAI).

Her publications include: *The Tragic Comedy of Samuel Beckett*, co-edited with Rossana Sebellin (forthcoming 2009); *Il teatro giacomiano e carolino* (2002), *La narrativa di Aldous Huxley* (1990), *Analisi dell'incubo. L'utopia negativa da Swift alla fantascienza* (1980), and several essays published in Italy and abroad, on utopias, dystopias, Beckett, and Jacobean theatre.

Jonathan Heron is Research Associate at The CAPITAL Centre, University of Warwick and Artistic Director of Fail Better Productions www.failbetter.co.uk

Ulrika Maude is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Durham, UK. She is the author of *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), and co-editor of *The Body and the Arts* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and *Beckett and Phenomenology* (Continuum, 2009). She is also the co-editor of *Beckett on TV*, a special issue of the *Journal of Beckett Studies*. She is currently writing a book on Modernism and Medical Culture.

Call for Papers

34TH ANNUAL COMPARATIVE DRAMA CONFERENCE

March 26-28, 2010 in Los Angeles, California

Submission Deadline: December 11, 2009

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 25 – 27, 2010**. 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, 2009**.

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

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Angela Moorjani is professor emerita of French and intercultural studies at the University of Maryland-UMBC. Her many publications on melancholy in literature and the arts include *Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, *The Aesthetics of Loss and Lessness*, and *Beyond Fetishism*. She coedited, with Linda Ben-Zvi, *Beckett at 100: Revolving It All* (Oxford UP), and her recent essays investigate gaze deixis, (inter)cultural ghosts, and multitiered effects in Beckett. With Sjef Houppermans, she is one of the two chief editors of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*.

Amy Muse is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she teaches courses in British literature, drama and performance studies. Her current research is on connections between nineteenth-century theatre and tourism about the Greek War of Independence.

Doug Phillips has published several essays on modern dramatists, including Patrick Marber, Will Eno, and Alan Bennett. His most recent article, "Classroom Drama: Beckett for the High School Set," was published in the 2008 volume of *Text & Presentation*. He teaches American and British literature at the Hill-Murray School in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Rossana M. Sebellin received her PhD from the University of Urbino "Carlo Bo," with a dissertation on Beckett's self-translation and the manuscripts of *Play* and *Not I* (and their French versions). She is currently working as lecturer at the University of Rome "Tor Vergata."

She has co-edited the book *The Tragic Comedy of Samuel Beckett* with Daniela Guardamagna, has published a book on Beckett's first attempt at drama ("*Prior to Godot*": *Eleutheria di Samuel Beckett*, 2006), another on Beckett's self-translation of *Play* and *Not I* (*La doppia originalità di Samuel Beckett*, 2008), and several articles on Beckett, Modernism and contemporary authors.

Anthony Uhlmann is Associate Professor at the University of Western Sydney. In addition to his publications on Samuel Beckett which include *Beckett and Poststructuralism*, 1999; *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, 2006; and *Arnold Geulincx' Ethics: With Samuel Beckett's Notes* (edited with Han Van Ruler and Martin Wilson, 2006). He has published articles relating the work of Deleuze, Foucault, Bergson and the Ancient Stoics to literature.

Dirk Van Hulle teaches English literature at the University of Antwerp, where he works at the Centre for Manuscript Genetics. He is an editor of the *Journal of Beckett Studies* and *Genetic Joyce Studies*, and maintains the Beckett society's Endpage. He is the author of *Textual Awareness* (2004) and *Manuscript Genetics, Joyce's Know-How, Beckett's Nohow* (2008). He is co-director of the *Beckett Digital Manuscript Project*, a member of the editorial board of *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, and is currently working with Mark Nixon on *Beckett's Library*.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

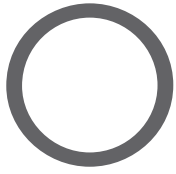
I am pleased to announce the election of two new members to the Executive Board of the Samuel Beckett Society. Jean-Michel Rabaté was voted President-Elect for 2009-2010 and President for 2011-2012; and Dirk Van Hulle was elected Member of the Executive Board for 2009-2012. On behalf of the entire Society, I would like to thank those members who stood for election to the Executive Board and to extend our warmest congratulations to Professors Rabaté and Van Hulle.

I would also like to invite everyone to attend the two sessions SBS will be hosting at the annual Modern Language Association conference in Philadelphia. "Beckett's Correspondence," will celebrate the publication of Beckett's letters this year with Cambridge University Press and inaugurate discussion of their scholarly significance. "Theatre After Beckett" will examine Beckett's place in modern drama and his on-going influence on the contemporary theatrical scene. Listed below are the details of these sessions, including times and places.

Finally, please feel free to contact Graley Herren or myself if you have suggestions for *The Beckett Circle* or the Society. I very much look forward to meeting with members at the MLA conference in December.

All good wishes,

Richard Begam



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

See the Membership and Dues form in the current issue for information about methods of payment.