



THE BECKETT CIRCLE LE CERCLE DE BECKETT

Newsletter of the Samuel Beckett Society

Street Beckett in London

A freezing night in south London and the sidewalks black with ice and treacherous. The city is its usual mixture of opulence, comfort, excitement, and hard urban squalor. I haven't been south of the river (except to go to the National Theatre and the NFT) in an age. I get lost. I have to read my *A to Z* in the chill and the harsh glare of streetlights. It's further from Waterloo than I thought. And then safety. The Calder Bookshop Theatre is like a haven of light and warmth in the bitter cold and the dark. Decades of meritorious avant-garde publishing, in their bright but resolutely unfrivolous covers, insulate the walls. One is welcomed and the guys that run the place are charming. There is even a seat reserved in the front row for your humble delegate from Poland and one for his companion. (She, however, in the austere manner that defines her, has bought her own ticket at the door.) I have been preening myself for days on having a chance to see Beckett's "Breath." I mean, a little performed piece of the canon, Beckett at his most laconic, no actor

on stage, and it lasts thirty-five seconds. I know serious Beckett scholars who have never seen it. I intend to dine out on this for years.

The stage is piled with miscellaneous rubbish—paper, plastic, a dismantled and difficult to define piece of furniture, a rough and dirty plank, a kettle, a market fruit box upended, an old bench, a page from some tabloid with a man's figure, a blackboard advertising a George Orwell evening upside down in the corner stage left. It's the detritus of the city, what is literally and substantially out there, outside, a few feet away, brought in here into the warmth and light. Four naked and large light bulbs hang in an even row above the refuse, like executed rats. Beckett's image, three-fold, as if from a series of abraded posters (an echo of a Jacques Villeglé image—*la comédie urbaine*), stares questioningly and unilluminated from the black back brick wall.

Suddenly there is a cry from behind, a sound we all know well, the pistol shot in the salon, the ill-mannered shout of urban decay.

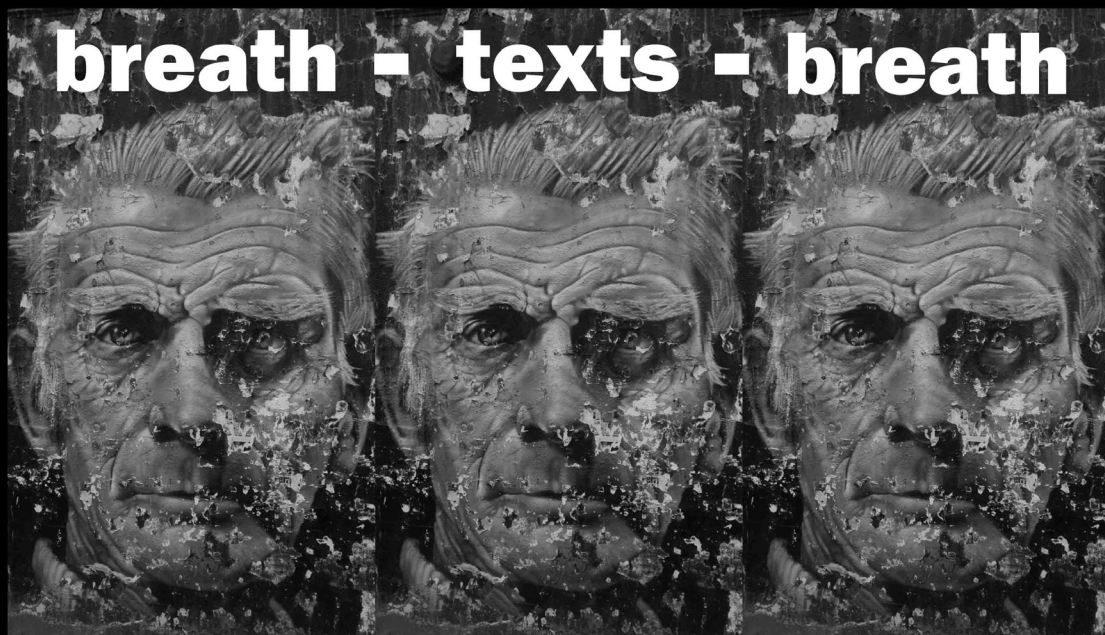
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a samuel beckett evening

with jon mckenna - directed by stanley gontarski

december 2 - 7pm - £6/£4 - the calder bookshop & theatre - 51 the cut - se1 8lf - 020 7620 2900



My companion informed me later that it was a demand to use the bookshop's toilet. I did not hear clearly. Nor does it matter quite what the shout was about. It was out of place, upsetting my *bien pensant*, self-congratulatory immersion in the cosmopolitan avant-garde. And to compound the indignity, he came and sat next to me. Street clothes, a woolly hat pulled down over his ears, that sheen of the refuse bin on his lined jacket, fingerless gloves, soiled shapeless jeans, stubble on his long chin, a rugged chapped veined face, and (worse and worse) a piece of sticking plaster on the bridge of his nose. What indignity was this? God, he's probably Scottish, one of my own. He stared at me fixedly, muttering unintelligibly. I went into my *Midnight Nation* mode. The urban poor are invisible; whatever you say, say nothing; whatever you do, no eye contact whatsoever.

And now my memory gets vague (a Beckettian point, surely). But this is how I remember it. The guy went away.

I saw "Breath." The stark austerity. The intense simplicity of means. The rejection of the human. The literalism of Beckett. The lights, not too bright, we cannot even have that much excitement, come on. There is a cry ("vagus" Beckett calls it in his script notes—not even a cry, something seen from a chillier perspective, more ridiculous). Breathing in, breathing out. A diminution of light. Silence.

And then the guy from the street comes back. Frame-break after frame-break, and now another. HE WENT ON STAGE!

I have to say I still wasn't sure. There was the intense embarrassment of watching someone doing something he shouldn't. Where *were* the proprietors? The derelict poked about the refuse ineffectually, not really interested. He picked up the kettle with a stick. He grubbed in the papers. And then he started to read.

I have to say I was relieved. Enough is enough is enough. But it had shaken me. (My companion said she had her suspicions all along, but then she actually lives in the Great Wen, and I only visit). The actor—so that's Jon McKenna, a good face, a skilled impersonation—starts to read some sheets of typescript he has raked from the futile junk of the stage. It's Beckett's *Texts for Nothing* XIII, that opaque and elegant meditation on the opacity of presence and absence, of being there and not being there, of making and not making, of making do and packing it in. Those lovely lyrical Beckettian repetitions and parallelisms rising slowly in a puzzled voice from a half-seen scrap of paper. "...it won't be long now, there won't be any life,

there won't have been any life, there will be silence, the air that trembled once an instant, the tiny flurry of dust quite settled....And were there one day to be here, where there are no days, which is no place, born of the impossible voice the unmakeable being, and a gleam of light, still all would be silent and empty and dark, as now, as soon now, when all will be ended, all said, it says, it murmurs."

And then "Breath" again in stark commentary on what had been seen and heard.

Afterwards, Stanley Gontarski and Jon McKenna talk affably and openly, without pretention, about their intentions with the evening. Both wish to liberate Beckett from the well-heeled theatre audiences and the great and the good of the West End stage, the knights of the footlights, the furs and the blue rinses, the stuffed shirts and cigars of culture and finance and the culture industry. They want to bring Beckett's paralyzed destitutes back down the grime and stench and cold of the modern urban wasteland. They want to give Beckett back an edge. It's persuasive and admirable, and a show like that night's certainly galvanizes the audience. Both Gontarski and McKenna know what they're doing and do it well. The evening has an urgency about it. Impoverishment, physical and spiritual, abandonment, despair are given an uneasy and concrete figuration. If I have a reservation, it is that—like all performances of Beckett—there is an inevitable impoverishment. The texts work on so many levels simultaneously. To bring "Breath" and *Texts for Nothing* down to the London streets is salutary and powerful, but the intellectual dimension and edge (another kind of edge) becomes attenuated in the real detritus and street-person's rage.

But this was a good evening in the theatre. It unsettled. It made one look very closely at the Beckett texts involved. It did not so much shrink, as specify and broaden the texts. It kept me and my companion in discussion and argument all the way back to the safety of North London. Congratulations, Mr. Beckett! Congratulations, Mr. McKenna! And congratulations, Mr. Gontarski!

By the way, I haven't sat in the front row of an audience since the late 1960s. Those of us who frequented theatres then know why. After "Breath-Texts-Breath," I might start doing it again. You miss out on a lot from the safety of the back row.

--David Malcolm



McKenna and Gontarski discuss *Breath - Text - Beckett* at Calder Bookshop

Watt and Endgame in Dublin

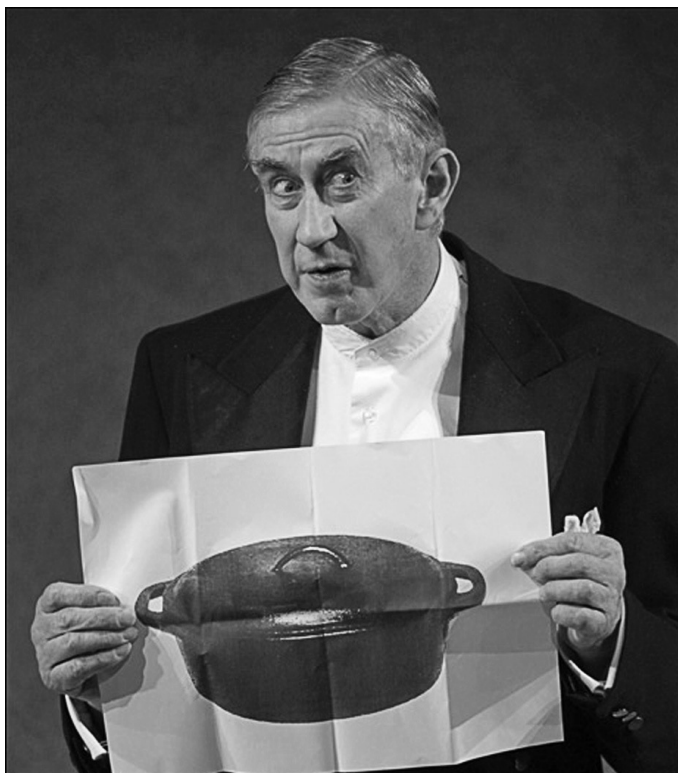
For the 53rd Dublin Theatre Festival in October 2010, the Gate Theatre offered not a solo festival on some of the plays of Samuel Beckett or Harold Pinter as it had in the past, but a mini-festival combining works by Beckett and Pinter with a third playwright (and the only one still living), David Mamet. The three names had already been conjoined by Michael Colgan for the Beckett on Film production of *Catastrophe*, with Mamet directing and Pinter playing the role of the tyrannical Director in Beckett's text. In a programme note, Colgan teased out the lines of connection and influence between the three. But the BPM project also bore a title: "The Relish of Language." Some argued that this was a strange way to describe playwrights who may have foregrounded language but who went for the most spare and unadorned prose possible. But, as Krapp demonstrates in Beckett's play, the relish of language may well be a matter of 'fundamental sounds', as when he draws out the sound of "Spooool" with audible relish, and the language of all three playwrights demands a musical precision in its interpreters. The festival afforded Colgan the opportunity to stage a full production of Pinter's last play, *Celebration*, having previously mounted an all-star reading and a filmed version. The Mamet, *Boston Marriage*, was uncharacteristically an all-female trio. But inviting as these productions were (all the more when entrusted to such outstanding young directors as Wayne Jordan and Aoife Spillane-Hinks), the

greatest interest was occasioned by the two Beckett offerings: a stage(d) version of Beckett's 1940s novel, *Watt*, and a fresh production of *Endgame*. The former featured another young director, Tom Creed, but its solo performer and adapter of the prose text was Barry McGovern, returning to the terrain he so revealingly first explored in the 1980s with his staging of the prose trilogy as *I'll Go On*. *Endgame*'s direction was entrusted to Alan Stanford, an outstanding Hamm in the past and the Gate's chosen interpreter of Pozzo; Stanford has moved increasingly into direction in recent years (Shakespeare, Shaw, Wilde, Pinter) but this was his first Beckett.

In fashioning a dramatic script from *Watt*, McGovern's adaptation adhered to the narrative contours outlined in the book: the journey of the title character to Mr. Knott's Big House; his period as a servant there, first on the ground floor, then on the first; and finally his departure to the train station. The boundaries of the Gate stage were extended to accommodate *Watt*'s decision, when overcome by exhaustion on the public highway, to sit in a ditch and ruminate; McGovern perched on the edge of the stage and spoke directly to the audience. The sounds of the mixed choir he hears at that point were acoustically conveyed, as were the "Kreks" and "Kriks" of the three frogs which are allotted a full two pages of Beckett's text. Less successful was the opening metatheatrical gag where McGovern came onstage in his butler's outfit and had to angrily pause while the similarly attired Front-of-House Manager, Vincent Brightling, admonished the audience to switch off their mobile phones. McGovern wore the same outfit throughout, appropriate to his period of service in Mr. Knott's house,



Linehan and Keogh in the Gate's *Endgame*.



McGovern in the Gate's *Watt*.

less so to the journeying to and fro. His spoken narrative, however, did full justice to the elaborate clothes in which Watt's physical body is concealed: his hat, his greatcoat, and his two distinct pieces of footwear, a boot and a shoe. The verbal relish and comic timing that McGovern brought to the description of same could not have been bettered and shows that in Beckett's final prose work before abandoning English for French there was still a considerable degree of verbal ostentation and flourish:

This boot Watt had bought, for eightpence, from a one-legged man, who, having lost his leg, and a fortiori his foot, in an accident, was happy to realize, on his discharge from hospital, for such a sum, his unique remaining marketable asset. He little suspected that he owed this good fortune to Watt's having found, some days before, on the seashore, the shoe, stiff with brine, but otherwise shipshape.

This account of Watt's appearance is delivered early (as one might expect) in McGovern's adaptation; but it occurs very near the end of the novel. For that narrative, as it takes the pains to point out, is not delivered in linear fashion: "Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story." Little, if any, damage is caused by moving it up in this fashion.

But a more serious question attends the fate of the novel's many set-piece digressions in the telling of its tale, almost on a par with *Tristram Shandy*. McGovern adeptly conveys the procedures by which the arrival of a new servant in Mr. Knott's service is simultaneously counterbalanced by the departure of a predecessor: but what of the departing Arsene's twenty-five page monologue? A more recent arrival Arthur tells a story of equal length about a friend engaged in doctoral research at Trinity College,

Dublin (not named but all too recognizable), and the surrealistic viva to which he is subjected. Of course a great deal of this had to go, and my complaint is to some degree the generic one of someone confronting the inevitable truncation of a novel when adapted for stage or screen. But too much has been sacrificed to keep to the linear narrative, and insufficient attention given to Michael Colgan's point in his programme note that Beckett, Pinter and Mamet "consistently sacrifice plot, character and even logic on the altar of their irreverent and precise language." Mr. Knott's house offers little by way of company; and the master, when he deigns to appear, does not communicate in an intelligible fashion. But McGovern mines as much humor as he can from the local gardener who pronounces third and fourth "turd" and "fart" and from the father and son who come to tune the piano. It is in Watt's encounters with the fishwoman Mrs. Gorman that narrative incident is combined with verbal wordplay, both in the endless variations on a "man's man," a "woman's man" and so forth, and the increasingly frequent physical exchanges between the woman sitting on the man and the man sitting on the woman. In the wildly humorous sexual and verbal play and the formal pedantry with which it is enunciated, McGovern the adapter provides McGovern the performer with a set-piece as memorable and enduring as the "sucking stones" episode from *I'll Go On*.

The Gate assembled an outstanding quartet of actors for its latest *Endgame*. Owen Roe has graduated in the last decade from comic support to one of the Irish stage's greatest interpreters of its iconic roles (most recently, the title part in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*, also at the Gate). David Bradley, an outstanding British stage actor who won Irish and English theatre awards for his Spooner in Pinter's *No Man's Land* in 2008, returned to the Gate as Clov. By casting Des Keogh and Rosaleen Linehan as Nagg and Nell, Colgan was astutely drawing in an Irish audience who would have followed their satirical double act on Irish politics over the decades, while others would have seen their more serious dramatic roles; Linehan was returning to Beckett after playing Winnie on stage and film. The production that resulted was without question the funniest *Endgame* I have seen, particularly welcome after the dreariness that has attended some of its recent outings. Bradley's communications with the muttering Nagg in his ashbin was timed to comic perfection. I have never seen the narrative setpieces in the play delivered to greater theatrical effect and was reminded of how central they are to Beckett's text. Hamm delivered his story of the imploring beggar with animation, drawing out both its verbal elaboration ("There's English for you") and its refined cruelty. Keogh's vaudevillean rendering of the joke about the Jewish tailor, the trousers and the creation of the world could not technically be bettered (a reminder of both Keogh's and Stanford's decades of professional expertise) and gained its laughs. But in being so thoroughly aimed at the audience, it missed out on the interchange between Nagg and Nell of which it forms so crucial a part, and their dramatic interplay was seriously undermined.

There were oddities about this production, some effective, others less so. Bradley was considerably older than Roe, even though the text allows for the possibility that Clov may be Hamm's son (or at least a surrogate). His looming physical presence suggested that he was the one holding Hamm prisoner, for all of his role as a servant. Owen Roe, that most physical of actors, was not only confined to his chair but swathed in a blanket and wrapped in a beard that made him virtually unrecognizable. The set (Eileen Diss provided the setting for all of the festival's plays) beautifully framed the action in a way that suggested *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, but thrust the ashbins too much to the fore. The production as a whole might better have attended to Nell's remarks about laughter, that its proper subject (in Beckett) is unhappiness and that the crucial point is the one at which we still find it funny but stop laughing.

Watt is a work-in-progress, as was clear when I attended both its first and last performances in the festival; the latter revealed a more profound sounding of Beckett's daunting prose work in McGovern's adaptation and performance. Future Gate productions of *Endgame* should bear in mind what this one revealed of the longer-term losses as well as the short-term gains to be achieved by pursuing Beckett primarily for laughter: "Beckett Lite," however tempting, is never in the end the best option.

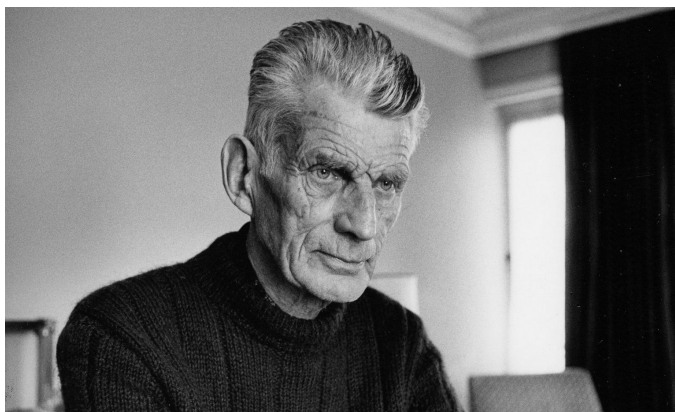
--Anthony Roche

Beckett at MLA 2011

The Samuel Beckett Society sponsored the panel, "Beckett and Theory," at the Modern Language Association Annual Convention, held during its new time, 6-9 January 2011 in Los Angeles. Some of the MLA'ers, so close to where the Lakers play with hopes of defending their NBA championship, reported disorientation by the convention's newness or lack thereof. It was appropriate then, that the Beckett panel took up infinite repetition, the return of the old, and the nature of the event or the game, as all the panelists reconsidered the question of Beckett's relationship to philosophy.

"Beckett and Theory" met in the early afternoon on Friday, January 7 with Anthony Uhlmann presiding. The session was reorganized shortly before the conference because Pascale Casanova, who had planned to present a paper, was regrettably unable to attend. Thomas J. Cousineau (Washington College) opened the session with "Deleuze and Beckett: Disguising Repetitions in *Endgame*," a paper focusing not on repeat championships but repressions that enable repetition and disguise. In his fascinating reading of *Endgame* (1957) and photographs of Beckett directing his plays, Cousineau deployed Gilles Deleuze's revision of Freud's formula on responses to traumatic experience: We do not repeat because we repress; rather, we repress in order to repeat and in order to disguise. Cousineau claimed that *Endgame*'s Hamm exhibits a Freudian repetition resulting from repressions of his personal trauma. In contrast, Beckett himself adapts a Deleuzian form of repetition in which the voluntary repression of the cultural past in art partially reveals the origins of the trauma. Cousineau connected these two forms of repetition in *Endgame* to another Deleuzian distinction, that of the "impotent" and "slavish" "desire for power" (in Hamm) and the positive and capable "will to power" of Beckett.

If the argument occasionally veered toward a biographical reading of *Endgame*, it productively troubled the binaries between art and life as well as the will to and desire for power. Cousineau reminded us of Nietzsche's warning that the will to power always contains reactive or slavish forces. He suggested that in *Endgame* and much of his fiction, Beckett projects compulsive repetitions and the desire for power upon alter-egos, like Hamm, who are compulsive storyteller/writers or dictatorial protagonist/directors. These alter-egos are part of a series of disguises in *Endgame*, including the original setting of Picardie following World War I, which returns as an unspecified but decimated location, repetitions of earlier, discarded works, and allusions to music, paintings, and literature (especially the Bible). Cousineau concluded his provocative paper with the suggestion that the compulsion to repeat may be the other side of the impulse to create art. Beckett uses the involuntary repression of his characters to achieve the play's voluntary forgetting of cultural traumas—that will be half-remembered by audiences, understood differently, and perhaps, not repeated.



THANK YOU

The Beckett Circle appreciates the generous support of Xavier University, in particular Dean Janice Walker, Provost Roger Fortin, and the Office of University Communications.

The following paper focused on philosophers who turn away from the Kantian category or Platonic ontology to imagine the world as an ongoing process, an Event. In "Beckett and Eventality," Richard Begam (University of Wisconsin, Madison and outgoing president of the Samuel Beckett Society) applied the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Alain Badiou to Beckett's *Molloy* (1951). He read the novel as the story of Moran's quest for himself at another stage of his life (as Molloy), which constitutes a sustained engagement with subjectivity, of course, but with a subject that is also an event. Begam repositioned modernism's familiar challenges to subjectivity, objectivity, and stable realities in an energized aesthetic field of kinetic movement and happenings. The familiar Beckett of impotence and nothing-happening, becomes a creator of modernist eventality.

Begam read Heidegger's deconstruction of the Platonic antithesis between Being and Time as a reconception of subjectivity as Event (*Ereignis*). This event conjoins past, present, and future and thereby constitutes the subject as the one who perceives being as defined by his/her becoming: Moran's being is defined by his becoming Molloy. Turning to Badiou, Begam claimed that the 1988 *L'être et l'événement* (*Being and Event*)

historicizes and politicizes Heideggerian eventality. Badiou's event is a rupture in time that brings about a new subjectivity, which he associates with a "mathematics of infinity."

The usefulness of Badiou's mathematics, for Begam, is that Beckett also uses mathematics to represent subjectivity in different ways, that is, to replace representationalism with performativity. The horizontal metal bar with Xs on each end that Molloy picks up but cannot identify leads him to consider the "true division" of "twenty-two by seven" (86). Begam pointed out that this fraction approximates pi and suggested that pi is a form of eventality, a function that will extend to infinity and endlessly fill pages when it is performed but not represented. Begam identified other moments, such as Molloy's sixteen stones or the five biscuits in *Murphy* (1938), when Beckett passes a number of objects through a permutation so that they gesture toward infinity. Beckett performs the same operation on language, in Begam's reading, so that the statement that closes the *Trilogy*, "you must go on," is negated, "I can't go on," and leads to its assertion, "I'll go on." In an elegant closing, Begam revealed that the last word of the *Trilogy* points to infinity and *on*, the Greek term for "being."

Jean-Michel Rabaté (University of Pennsylvania and incoming president of the Beckett Society) brought the panel to a provocative close with his paper "Beckett's Three Critiques: Kantian Bathos as Prolegomena to Future Literature." Rabaté began by clarifying problems in the discussion of the relationship between Beckett's work and philosophy, a discussion which all of the panelists had entered. One position, which Rabaté associated with Matthew Feldman, uses manuscript evidence and

textual scholarship to argue that Beckett's engagement with philosophy was intense but short-lived, confined to a "philosophical decade" from 1928 to 1938. Philosophers such as Adorno, Badiou, and Deleuze, who suggest that all of Beckett's writing should be read as philosophy, represent the opposing position. Rabaté positioned himself nearer the latter camp in a paper that touched on Georges Bataille's review of *Molloy* (1951) as a literature of anti-humanism, Maurice Blanchot's 1949 *Lautréamont et Sade*, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1969), and Johann August Heinrich Ulrich's *Eleutheriology* (1788) as a source for Beckett's title *Eleutheria*, among others. While it may have been difficult to follow this array of philosophers and cultural critics, Rabaté offered fascinating insights into Beckett's work, perhaps somewhat self-consciously pointing out that Beckett's references to philosophy are often ironic and function like decoys to gather reference hunters.

Rabaté certainly did not confine himself to reference-hunting but produced interesting readings of *Eleutheria* (1947), *Molloy* (1951), and *Watt* (1953). Rabaté's central focus was on Beckett's engagement with Kant, whose collected works were acquired by Beckett in 1938, the day before

he was stabbed by a pimp. Rabaté did not postulate any meaningful connection between the two events, but the anecdote worked nicely to set up Rabaté's analysis of the influence of Kantian bathos on Beckett's depictions of torture, healing,

eroticism, and impotence. Rabaté defined bathos as the low place or failed sublime that runs through Beckett's oeuvre and that is central to understanding his relationship to philosophy. Beckett's first play, *Eleutheria*, offers a principle that Rabaté named "bathos mathos" as opposed to Sophoclean "pathos mathos": we learn when we have gone to the heights and depths, not just when we have suffered. Rabaté read *Watt* as a machine of repetitive bathos, pointing out that *Watt's* overdetermined name invokes the inventor of the steam engine James Watt (1736-1819) as well as the question "what?" Rabaté pointed out that Beckett insisted he was not a philosopher and had not undertaken a comprehensive study of philosophy. Rabaté interpreted this statement as an indication that, for Beckett, thought was like music, depending on form as much as content, the cry and the laugh, pathos and bathos.

The discussion following the three fascinating papers demonstrated both how productive it can be to read Beckett in relation to philosophy and how difficult. The panelists engaged with the audience as well as each other's work, discussing if it is possible to adequately describe Beckett's relation to philosophy, if their findings in Beckett can be generalized to all of literature, and if there are, in fact, events in Beckett's texts. We may hope that as the new MLA grows older next year in Seattle (a city that recently lost its Supersonic NBA team) the Beckett Society will offer another stimulating event.

--Carrie J. Preston

Journée d'étude « Beckett et la Musique », Cité de la Musique, le 17 décembre 2010

[Editor's Note : I thank Bogdan Manojlovitch for offering these minutes from the "Beckett and Music" seminar in French as well as in his own English translation.]

« Mon oeuvre est affaire de sons fondamentaux (blague à part) émis aussi complètement que possible, et je n'accepte la responsabilité de rien d'autre... ».

Samuel Beckett ¹

Lorsqu'on se rend compte de l'importance, de la place majeure de la dimension sonore dans l'oeuvre de Beckett, la Journée d'étude « Beckett et la Musique », organisée par Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée, le 17 décembre 2010, nous apparaît comme une direction de futures recherches absolument indispensable.

Faute de place, nous n'entrerons pas dans la polémique pour savoir lequel de deux pôles, sonore ou visuel est plus important dans l'oeuvre de Beckett. A notre avis c'est le versant (pôle) sonore qui est encore plus essentiel, bien qu'il soit inséparable de l'autre. Et nous parlons ici uniquement du monde visible de l'oeuvre beckettienne, et non pas de celui invisible, beaucoup plus vaste, subjectif, personnel et mystérieux..., monde qui rejoint quelque part celui du versant sonore dans les hauteurs vertigineuses propres à la création littéraire de Beckett ! Prenons, comme exemple, ce passage de « Watt », la scène dans la salle de musique avec les deux Galle, accordeurs de piano, où se produit un glissement de langage ².

Ce qui est remarquablement bien indiqué ici, c'est ce qui arrive lorsque l'échelle sémantique (qui soutient ce qu'on appelle le « réel ») vient de disparaître. Et à ce moment là, il y a un phénomène singulier qui se produit : la parole continue de parler malgré tout, et au fur et à mesure qu'elle parle, le langage s'éloigne et paraît peu à peu s'éteindre, très en retrait de soi. Ce qui reste finalement, c'est apparemment une image sonore qui semblerait flotter au-dessus des choses ou plutôt une image dans laquelle le peu de choses encore restant sembleraient flotter. Les choses elles-mêmes se déréalisent faute de pouvoir disposer de l'échelle sémantique du langage... et à ce moment précis Beckett désigne un état visuel qui est étrangement donné dans la seule sonorité des mots sans que les mots puissent s'accorder à l'échelle sémantique du langage. « Watt » est le récit d'un événement dont toute la production ultérieure de Beckett ne sera que les conséquences inéluctables. Et, la meilleur exemple en est cette prodigieuse pièce Play / « Comédie » (1964), un chef d'oeuvre !

Si dans ses premiers écrits, les allusions à des compositeurs abondent, peu à peu le lien avec la musique se précise, et notamment dans ses pièces télévisuelles, qui reprennent jusqu'au titre d'oeuvres de Schubert, de Beethoven etc. En retour, des musiciens, tels que Mihailovici, Feldman,

Berio, Kurtag, ou Dusapin, parmi d'autres, se sont inspirés des oeuvres de Beckett pour leurs compositions. Les écrits beckettien suivent, comme la musique, une pure logique immanente de succession, pas une logique de signification !

Or, il est très important de préciser ici que tout naît de l'écoute du son (il faut apprendre, impérativement, à écouter l'autre) qui puise ses racines dans le silence du Principe. Il faut apprendre à maîtriser les silences très nombreux chez Beckett et d'une importance absolument capitale, hélas souvent négligés ! C'est pourquoi chaque interprète (aussi bien de musique qu'au théâtre, surtout celui beckettien) doit avant TOUT faire vœu de silence, car les sons s'y inscrivent et non le contraire !

La plupart des auteurs littéraires soignent, avec plus ou moins de succès, cet aspect sonore de leur oeuvre... mais Beckett est allé le plus loin de tous. Son oeuvre essentiellement poétique, place intrinsèquement la création littéraire le plus près possible de la création musicale, plus près qu'aucun autre écrivain n'ait fait avant et après lui. Cela d'ailleurs a comme conséquence que l'interprétation sur scène des pièces de Beckett pose des difficultés considérables et se trouve parfois à la limite du « jouable » ! Les metteurs en scène de théâtre beckettien auront intérêt à étudier au préalable, un peu plus de « phénoménologie musicale »...

Mais, fallu-t-il transposer les textes de Beckett carrément dans l'univers musicale, sonore ? C'est beaucoup plus complexe que cela (Cf. : discussion Beckett-Stravinsky ³). Il ne s'agit pas – en parlant de ces textes – d'un simple libretto... d'un prétexte, support d'une création musicale quelconque. Il s'agit des structures sonores profondes ...émises aussi complètement que possible par auteur, qui, afin de réaliser une sonorité satisfaisante, comme tous les compositeurs se préoccupe et se sert également d' accent, d' accord, de développement, de nuance, de rythme, de répétition, de tempo, de thème varié, de da capo (recommencement cyclique) etc.

C'est dans ce sens d'investigations et d'interrogations passionnantes que s'engageait et se dirigeait cette remarquable Journée d'étude « Beckett et la Musique » qui commence par un brillant exposé d' Antonia Soulez (philosophe et musicienne) qui nous démontre que le « solipsisme » beckettien ⁴ n'est pas une « musique dissonante » comme le croyait l'infortuné Adorno, qui préconiserait même de musicaliser ce « solipsisme ». Or, ce n'est pas une « musique dissonante » (ou musique tout court) qui conviendrait pour musicaliser ce « solipsisme ». A. Soulez nous montre justement au contraire pourquoi la dissonance étant encore « chose à comprendre » (comme « Fin de partie »), et que c'est plutôt pour nous une musique asémantique de bruits, désertée par idée, qui serait hic et nunc la mieux désignée.

Puis, Franz Michaël Maier (chercheur musicologue) intervient sur la ligne mélodique comme métaphore de co-

3 En 1962, lors d'un dîner avec Stravinsky, Beckett le demande est-il possible de noter le tempo de la représentation de ses pièces ? Il souhaite, en particulier chronométrer les silences de « Godot ».

4 « solipsisme » beckettien concerne rébellion contre un « système de cohérence » et la question que se pose Adorno si les manifestations sonores chez Beckett sont des bruits organisés selon des structures, ou bien de la musique ?

1 Lettre à Alain Schneider, décembre 1957. .

2 « Watt », Editions de Minuit, 1968, p.73

hérence temporelle dans deux œuvres de Samuel Beckett : « *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* » (1932) et « *La dernière bande* » (1958). Il souligne que dans les *Confessions* de Saint-Augustin, par exemple, la ligne mélodique représente l'idée d'un processus temporel cohérent et visant une fin concluante : la vie de l'homme est comparée à une telle mélodie. A plusieurs reprises, Samuel Beckett a intégré cette métaphore dans l'argumentation esthétique d'une œuvre. Maier cite et analyse deux exemples antagonistes : le roman « *Dream* » et la pièce « *La dernière bande* ».

Jérôme Bodon-Clair (doctorant à l'Université de Saint Etienne) analyse la « place de la musique dans « *Play* » / *Comédie* de Samuel Beckett, qui qualifie « une sonate au purgatoire ». Au delà de ces procédés innovants de mise en scène, la pièce accorde une place très importante à la musique, de l'analogie supposée *projecteur / chef d'orchestre* à la rythmique acérée des répliques. Et la musique, n'affecte pas seulement la pièce en surface (Cf. : plus avant). En effet, après une analyse affinée du texte, une structure sous-jacente de sonate classique se dessine et l'on retrouve tous les ingrédients de la sonate, exposition, développement, ré-exposition aussi, de *da capo*, et *coda* ⁵ !

Ana Koszewska (musicologue) étant souffrante, envoie sa très intéressante contribution sur « l'art où le miroir de son époque : Samuel Beckett et Luciano Berio comme les témoins de la vérité ». L. Berio a inséré dans le troisième mouvement de sa « *Sinfonia* » (1968-69) une citation d'un fragment du roman *L'Innommable*, traitant le texte verbal de Beckett comme matière sonore pour sa musique, faisant abstraction de sa structure sémantique.

Grégoire Tosser (docteur en musicologie) analyse deux chefs-d'œuvre récents de György Kurtag, composés sur des

5 fin, conclusion d'un morceau de musique. « *Coda d'une fugue* » par exemple.

poèmes de Samuel Beckett. Le choix des trente-et-un textes opéré par Kurtag manifeste une volonté d'adéquation entre son propre fragment musical et les *mirlitonades* du poète (Beckett), que ce soit du point de vue de la brièveté de l'écriture que du jeu sur le *presque rien* beckettien. De plus, la relation à la langue est changeante, bouleversante qui tente de se déployer sous la constante menace du *silence* !

Marc Blanchet (écrivain-essayiste) : « A propos de *Souffle* ». L'intervenant propose une approche remarquable et analyse minutieusement cette pièce-gageure « *Souffle* » de Beckett (1969) d'une durée de trente-cinq secondes que l'on peut qualifier d'*anti-musicale*, si, paradoxalement, nous n'étions face à sa précision de partition et son déroulement de métronome... qui conféraient à la pièce une sorte de *musicalité* interne intense ! Avec ses enregistrements, ses amplifications, ses montage et minutage, une construction en miroir et l'absence sinon l'éviction de tout comédien, *Souffle* est d'une audace radicale !

Martin Laliberté (compositeur et Professeur des Universités) choisit le thème : « Beckett et Berio : le cas de la *Sinfonia* et de *L'Innommable* ». Il précise d'emblée que dans le long processus des musiciens de la table rase sérielle vers un opéra profondément renouvelé et une ouverture du langage musical « savant », la symphonie avec huit voix amplifiées de Berio occupe une place importante. Le texte de « *L'Innommable* » lui sert de fil conducteur au troisième mouvement et dans son jeu de collages, de citations et de réécritures évoquant aussi Joyce.

Cette très réussie *Journée d'Etude* s'achève par une table ronde des intervenants, organisateurs et avec notre humble participation (échanges avec la salle, conclusions et perspectives...).

--Bogdan Manojlovitch

Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies Annual Seminar at the University of Oxford

After several years under the direction of Erik Tønning and Matthew Feldman, "Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies" moves this year to a new location under new leadership. Seminar organizers Peter Fifield and John Bolin are pleased to announce the speakers for this year's series, which is supported by St John's College and the Faculty of English at the University of Oxford.

All sessions convene at 5pm on Tuesdays in Trinity Term 2011 in the New Seminar Room, St John's College, Oxford.

- 3 May – Andrew Kötting (Professor and Filmmaker, University for the Creative Arts) "Kötting's First Tape"
- 10 May – Iain Bailey (Postdoctoral Fellow in English, University of Manchester) "'My name in full': Emendation, Intertextuality and Minutiae in Beckett's Drafts"
- 17 May – Garin Dowd (Reader in Film and Media Studies, Thames Valley University) "Beckett's cinema legacies: strategies of citation in four films from the last decade."
- 24 May – Graley Herren (Professor in English, Xavier University, Ohio) "Mourning Becomes Electric: *Hamlet*, *Endgame*, and the Mediation of Loss"
- 31 May – Mark Nixon (Lecturer in English, Director of Beckett International Foundation, co-director of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project, University of Reading), "herrdoktoring: The Use of Manuscripts in Beckett Studies"

- 7 June – Shane Weller (Professor of Comparative Literature and Co-Director of the Centre for Modern European Literature, University of Kent), "Towards a Literature of the Unword: Beckett, Kafka, Sebald"
- 14 June – John Pilling (Professor Emeritus of English and European Literature, University of Reading), "Beckett/Sade: texts for nothing"
- 21 June – Sean Lawlor (University of Reading) "'A good thing about hope': Doggerelizing Chamfort and the *mirlitonades*"

We look forward to seeing you at these seminars, which are open to all and free to attend.

Any enquiries should be directed to beckett.debt-sandlegacies@gmail.com

A Day of Study “Beckett and Music,” held in Paris at Cité de la Musique, 17 December 2010

“My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else....”

Samuel Beckett¹

When considering the importance, the prominent place held by the dimension of sound in Beckett’s work, the Day of Study “Beckett and Music,” organized by the University of Paris, East Marne-la-Vallée campus, on 17 December 2010, appears to be a future direction for research that is absolutely indispensable, saving and advantageous.

Due to our lack of space, we will not get into a debate over which sense, sound or sight, is more important in Beckett’s work. In our opinion, the sound is even more essential, in as much as it can be separated from the other. And we are speaking here only of the visible world of Beckett’s work, and not of the invisible world, much more vast, subjective, personal and mysterious . . . , a world which merges sometimes with that of sound (and is even confused with it) in the vertiginous heights characteristic of Beckett’s literary creations! As an example, we will cite this passage in the music room with the two Gall(s), from “Watt” where the writer produces a gradual glissando of language (“Watt”, *Minuit*, p.73, 1968)

What is remarkably well indicated here is what happens when the semantic scale (which holds up what is called the “Real”) has disappeared. And at this moment, there is a singular phenomenon produced: the word continues to speak despite everything, and gradually what it says (having the power to continue speaking), the language lies back and seems little by little to pass away, very much retiring from itself. In the end what remains is apparently a sound image which seems to float above thing or rather an image in which a few things still remain floating. The things themselves become less real because of the power wielded by the semantic scale of language.... “Watt” is the depiction of an event of which all the rest of Beckett’s writing is just an unavoidable consequence. And, the best example of this is that prodigious play, *da capo*², “Play” (1964), an absolute masterpiece!

Beckett said the same thing himself, that his writing was also a kind of *game*. . . like *music*, they both follow a pure immanent logic in succession, not a logic of representation. If in his first writings the allusions to composers abound, little by little the connection to music becomes more specific, as in “Play” and in his plays written for television, which even sample the titles of works by Schubert, Beethoven and the likes. On the other hand, musicians like

1 From a letter to Alan Schneider, December 1957, in *The Village Voice Reader*, p. 185. This surprising observation was confirmed to me personally by Beckett, himself, during our interview in May 1987 in Paris.

2 *Da capo*, which is usually found at the end of a piece of music we have returned to the beginning of the play . . . modifying the rhythm and the tempo

Mihailovici, Feldman, Berio, Kurtag, Dusapin, among others, have been inspired in writing their own compositions in diverse forms by Beckett’s works.

Methodologically, the studies of “poetic or musical sound” have put forth two types of approach: reductionsim and over-interpretation. On the one hand, the investigative techniques decontextualize the sounds from the situations that produce them to reconstruct a coherent “code” meant to govern each part of the practices.... On the other hand, the works are reduced to the projection of collective values, without cause or effect, or their own dynamics. Language or mirror, the sound (musicality) is at once reified and disincarnated³. The concrete uses and varieties of organized sound become inaudible. . . more particularly with Beckett! How can this be avoided? What methodological approach should be adopted? The sound (or musicality)—especially with Beckett—does it really depend on the ineffable? It is impossible, right here, to develop this fundamental questioning further. Let’s simply say, here, that it is very important to specify that all comes from listening to sound (one must learn—it is imperative—to listen to the other) which sinks its roots in the Principle of Silence. One has to learn to master the silences so numerous in Beckett and of an absolutely capital importance, though, alas, often neglected! This is why each interpreter (as much with music as with theatre, especially the Beckettian theatre) must first and foremost take a vow of silence, because the sounds are written here and not elsewhere!

But is it necessary to transpose Beckett’s work on to a musical universe, a universe of sound? It is much more complex than that (Cf: discussion between Beckett and Stravinsky⁴). In talking of these texts, we’re not speaking of a simple libretto...of some pretext, a framework for some kind of musical creation. It has to do with deep sound structures...put out as completely as possible by the writer, who, after achieving sonic satisfaction, like all the composers who are as concerned with developing *accent, agreement, plot, nuance, rhythm, repetition, tempo, different themes, da capo* (cyclical renewal) etc.

It is in this sense of passionate investigation and questioning that this remarkable Day of Study “Beckett and Music” was initiated and directed, beginning with a brilliant report by Antonia Soulez (philosopher and musician) who showed us that Beckett’s “solipsism”⁵ is not a “dissonant music” as was believed by a hapless Adorno, who even recommended the musicalization of this “solipsism.” But, it is not a “dissonant music” (or simply just music) that would make it appropriate to *musicalize* this “solipsism.” A. Soulez shows us just the opposite why with *dissonance* still being a “*thing to comprehend*” (as in “Endgame”), and that it is rather for us an asemantic music of *noises*, void of idea, that would be *hic et nunc* the better designation.

Then, Franz Michael Maier (researcher, musicologist) weighs in on the melody line as a metaphor for temporal

3 Removed from Reality . . . deprived of its “body”.

4 In 1962, during a dinner with Stravinsky, Beckett asked him if it was possible to register the tempo in the performances of his plays? He wanted especially to time the pauses in “Godot.”

5 Beckett’s “solipsism” concerns the rebellion against a “system of coherence” and the question Adorno poses is if the manifestations of sound with Beckett are noises organized according to structures, or very much to music?

cohesion in two of Samuel Beckett's works: "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" (1932) and "Krapp's Last Tape" (1958). He points out that in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, for example, the melodic line represents the idea of a coherent temporal process and lays down a fine conclusion: the life of Man is compared to such a melody. Several times, Samuel Beckett integrated this metaphor with the esthetic debate of a work. Maier cites and analyses two opposing examples: the novel "Dream" and the play "Krapp's."

Jerome Bodon-Clair (with a doctorate from the University of St. Etienne) analyses the "place of Music in 'Play' / the Comedy of Samuel Beckett, which he describes as "a sonata to Purgatory." Beyond these innovative practices in direction, the play gives a very important place to Music, from the analogy of the *lighting plan as orchestra leader* to the rhythmic biting of the dialogue. And Music does not only effect the surface of the play (see above). In fact, after an detailed analysis of the text, an underlying structure of the classical sonata is discernable and all the ingredients of the sonata are found: exposition, development, and re-exposition, of *da capo* and *coda*!

Ana Koszewska (a musicologist) was unable to attend because of illness, but she sent a very interesting contribution on "Art as the Mirror of its age: Samuel Beckett and Luciano Berio as witnesses for the Truth." L. Berio, the third movement of his "Sinfonia" (1968-69) sampled a fragment from the novel "The Unnamable," treating Beckett's verbal text as sonic material for his music, and abstracting its semantic structure.

Gregoire Tosser (with a doctorate in Musicology) analyses two recent masterpieces by Gyorgy Kurtag, composed from the poems of Samuel Beckett. The choice of the thirty-one texts extracted by Kurtag shows a conscious equivalence between his own musical fragment and the pipings of the poet (Beckett), whether it is from the point of view of the brevity of the writing or a play on Beckett's *almost nothing*. Moreover, the relation to language is constantly changing, upsetting him to tries to use it under a constant threat of *silence*!

Marc Blanchet (writer-essayist): "A propos of *Breath*." The speaker suggested a remarkable approach and minute analysis of this *pièce-gageure* [il n'y a pas une traduction adequate pour ce term: *impossible-play ou chancey-play*] by Beckett, "*Breath*," (1969), which runs a full 35 seconds, that we could qualify as *anti-musical*, if, we were not in the face of his precise partitions and his metronomic development...which would give the play a sort of intense internal *musicality*! With his recordings, his amplifications, his editing and timing, it is a kind of mirror image with the absence if not the rejection of the actor, *Breath* has a sort of radical audacity!

Martin Laliberté (a composer and University Professor) chose the theme: "Beckett and Berio: the case of the *Sinfonia* and *The Unnamable*." From the beginning he specifies that in the long process favored by musicians of the serial blank-slate variety toward an completely renewed opera and an overture of "savant" musical language, Berio's symphony with eight amplified voices holds an important

place. The text of "*The Unnamable*" serves as a through-line to the third movement and in its collage games of quotes and rewritings suggestive of Joyce.

This very successful *Day of Study* was carried out by a round table of speakers, organizers and with our humble participation (discussions with the audience, views and conclusions...).

--Bogdan Manojlovitch



AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK
23-26 JUNE 2011

Registration is open for "Samuel Beckett: Out of the Archive," an international conference organized by Peter Fifield (St John's College, University of Oxford), Bryan Radley (University of York), and Lawrence Rainey (University of York). "Out of the Archive" embodies a pluralist embrace of artists, creative writers, theatre practitioners, and working scholars, bringing their specialist expertise into dialogue with a wider public through multiple media. To this end, the conference will be showcased by a series of events free and open to the public, events that speak to both Beckett's contemporaneity and his historicity.

Special Guests will include the Nobel-Prize winning author J. M. Coetzee, the Booker-Prize winning novelist John Banville, and Beckett's former publisher John Calder. John Minihan, whose images of Beckett in Paris and London have become iconic, will introduce an exhibition of his photographs of notable stage productions.

The conference will also include musical and dramatic performances. John Tilbury, one of the most consistently inventive pianists around, will perform two of his own Beckett-based pieces. These will be combined with a world première by composer and virtuoso percussionist Damien Harron, and the European première of an extraordinary Beckett-inspired piece by Leeds-based composer Martin Iddon. The Gare St Lazare Players will perform *First Love* and *The End*. Conor Lovett, considered by many to be the definitive Beckett performer, brings these one man tours de force to life, while Judy Hegarty Lovett's innovative direction is typical of a company renowned for their ability to expose the compassion, humour and integrity of Beckett's work.

The academic proceedings will be anchored by major keynote speakers Linda Ben-Zvi, Lois Overbeck, and Jean-Michel Rabaté, with numerous other invited speakers filling out four full days of scholarly and artistic exchange.

The key events will be captured on video and in a special issue of *Modernism/modernity*, the premier journal in the field. Overall we believe that this project will set a benchmark in Beckett studies and modernist studies.

For the full program of events and details on registration, consult the conference website, <http://www.outofthearchive.com/>, or contact the conference organizers at Beckett.outofthearchive@gmail.com.

6 A piece added after the formal end of a play. "Coda of a fugue" for example.

Oh les beaux jours in Paris

In October 2010 Beckett was once more playing at Paris's beautiful Théâtre de l'Athénée, which had recently hosted Xavier Marchand's *La dernière bande* and Bernard Lévy's *Fin de partie*. For manager Patrice Martinet it must have been quite a coup to draw a production by Bob Wilson, more often seen on the stages of the major national theatres in France, to this relatively intimate theatre. For Wilson admirers, the prospect of seeing how he would negotiate the encounter between his own highly-codified theatrical aesthetics and the specific requirements of Beckett's drama was particularly exciting.

Wilson claims he has always felt artistically close to Beckett, with whom he shares a phenomenal instinct for striking visual and aural images, limitless admiration for Buster Keaton and an all-encompassing, all-controlling conception of the director's role. Yet while Beckett kept experimenting with new forms and new media, and pushing against the limits of his art, Wilson rather tends to bring his own, polished theatrical language to whatever material he is dealing with. Although this often proves extraordinarily effective (as in his recent staging of La Fontaine's *Fables* at the Comédie française), he sometimes runs the risk of merely repeating himself.

His *Oh les beaux jours* bore the unmistakable stamp of a Wilson production: there was the usual luminous backdrop screen of changing shades of blue and purple, magnifying the deep blue of Winnie's dress, the intricate score of amplified sounds and voices, and the ample, stylised gestures of the actors. The "mound" was suggestive of a sharp-angled black volcano out of which Winnie seemed to be erupting. In complete contrast to this starkly abstract tableau, a framed picture occasionally appeared in the background, featuring a bucolic landscape painted in deliberately kitsch style, an ironic objective correlative to the unflinching optimism Winnie conjures up to get herself through her "happy days."

What made Wilson's *Oh les beaux jours* distinctive from other Wilson productions was the burlesque style of acting which he encouraged in Adriana Asti and Giovanni Battista Storti. Asti, who has worked on stage and screen with Fellini, Visconti, Strehler, Arias, and Pinter, to name but a few, is an immensely experienced actress who combines an irresistible comic talent with a truly impressive range of expressive colours. In her constricted circumstances Wilson had her act in the style of silent film actors, rolling her eyes and using exaggerated facial expressions under her white clown's make-up. In the same physical vein Storti, who was trained as a circus and mime artist, played a grotesque, obscene Willie, his song a barely recognisable lecherous groan.

Both performances would have been splendid, were it not for Wilson's decision to have the two Italian actors perform in a language they could not pronounce properly, and obviously did not always understand. It was not just that Asti's pronounced accent, especially, rendered the text barely intelligible, but perhaps even more disturbingly that the music of the script was quite lost. Though Wilson



Asti in Théâtre de l'Athénée's *Oh les beaux jours*

insists that he wanted to use Beckett's French version of the play because of its specific musicality, he obviously failed to realise that Asti's intonations were often simply wrong—so that the subtle patterns of echoes and ironies woven into the fabric of the play fell completely flat. While Wilson's emphasis on the burlesque, comedic aspect of the play is entirely defensible, his neglect of its verbal dimension is incompatible with Winnie's obsession with language, her only defence against the horror of her situation. Much of the pathos and comedy of the play depends on the contrast between her impeccable articulacy and the incomprehensible horror of the slow death she is living out on the stage. That "words fail, there are times when even they fail" is the ultimate irony, inscribed in the very structure of the play with its diminutive second act; but for the tragic implications of this failure to sink in, words must first be allowed to resonate in full. I came out of the theatre that night feeling that the immense talent of the two actors had been wasted, and wishing I could see the same cast in an Italian version of this production.

--Alexandra Poulain

CALL FOR PAPERS: SAML A Convention

4-6 November 2011 in Atlanta

The Samuel Beckett Society will be sponsoring a session on "Beckett and History," chaired by Katherine Weiss, at this year's South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention. The panel will include three 20-minute papers examining Beckett's prose, poetry, theater, and/or criticism in relation to history, memory, archive, and/or biography.

Interested participants should send abstracts of no more than 250 words to Katherine Weiss (weisk01@etsu.edu) and Dustin Anderson (danderson@georgiasouthern.edu) by 30 May 2011.

All That Fall in Cleveland

The majority of those who witnessed Caesar's Forum stage production of *All That Fall* at Kennedy's, an intimate underground theater in downtown Cleveland, would not understand Beckett's caustic reply to Barney Rosset in 1957 in regard to requests to stage *All That Fall*: "It is no more theatre than *Endgame* is a radio and to 'act' it is to kill it. Even the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings...will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing's *coming out of the dark*." Taking a page out of John Sowle's script for his 1997 Cherry Lane production of *All That Fall*, Greg Caesar creates a stage play within a radio play that likely "fooled" anyone who was unfamiliar with Beckett. So entertaining was the radio studio drama that Beckett newbies would not have known that this play was supposed to be *only* "coming out of the dark."

Pleasantly surprised by the full-house for a Sunday matinee show, I spent my time musing over the make-up of the audience and its reaction to the play. A by-product of teaching Beckett for two decades is the constant worry, if you like, of non-devotees not only failing to appreciate Beckett's work, but the possibility that the newbie will be offended or disgusted. Knowing the pitfalls of a stage production of a radio play also made me want to gauge the audience's reaction and ability to understand the play at more than the stage level.

What brought out Cleveland's unlikely theater-going audience? Beckett's reputation? Nothing much on at the movies? I don't know, and, in a way, I don't care. It was wonderful to see a disparate audience enjoying what must have been, if they were at all like the non-Beckett aficionados who accompanied me to the production, baffled, fascinated, and, in the end, amused and moved by the production.

Lee Mackey, as Maddy, a Cleveland thespian legend well into her eighties, carried the production, with significant assistance from John Kolibab, the radio station engineer and sound effects man extraordinaire. The octogenarian Mackey embodied and gave voice to Beckett's boyhood Protestant Ireland. Voluptuous, in a stately "old crone" Irish Protestant sort-of-way, Mackey's Maddy visually and vocally (Beckett would be happy to know the latter), presented her desire in a straightforward manner, and no one scoffed: "Love, that is all I asked, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection?" Later she explicitly expressed her longing for Mr. Tyler: "Venus birds! Billing in the woods all the long summer long. (Pause.) Oh cursed corset! If I could let it out, without indecent exposure. Mr. Tyler! Mr. Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge!"—to say nothing of Mr. Slocum's manly effort to load her into his make-believe car, tearing her frock and prompting concern that Dan will suspect her dalliance with Mr. Slocum "when he feels the hole."

Perhaps Beckett's clearest (and arguably most personal) representation of Protestant life in the newly created



Colerider and Mackey in *All That Fall*

Free State, *All That Fall* presents Maddy's confusion over language and politics with an off-handed, aloof Ascendancy flair. The play is all about the nuances of life in the late twenties and early thirties which Mackey brilliantly voiced through Maddy's confusion in her discussion with Catholic Christy "Do you find anything...bizarre about my way of speaking?" Her reference near the end to the "struggle with a dead language" is surely targeted at Protestant Ireland's fate after independence, and yet she also ironically laments, "Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our own poor dear Gaelic." These references, so important to understanding Maddy's place in the world, along with the uncertainty of "twenty-six, or is it thirty-six counties," were perhaps beyond most in the audience.

While Mackey held the Beckett play up so it would not "fall," the stage production betrayed Beckett's radio vision of "coming out of the dark." The stage play within the radio play was I believe the only level that many understood. Although the production was faithful to Beckett in so many ways—such as the differentiation of local Irish accents that reveal class and religion—it succeeded so well as a stage play that it failed to register as a radio play.

Shuffling the players in, out, and around the *mise-en-scene* so as to be positioned with their fake microphones, the drama among the players constituted a new "play" in its own right. The inevitability of the stage play taking on a life of its own is probably the root of Beckett's biting words to Rosset. Bewildered, judgmental, desirous, envious, conceited, and humorous looks and gestures—brought to light from "out of the dark"—all work to create a dramatic tale of actors who have a life of their own and come to work to enact a play called *All That Fall*.

Perhaps the only time the radio drama presented itself vividly to the audience was when Dan emerged. For some reason Glenn Colerider's Dan Rooney acted "blind"; this production decision Beckett definitely would not like. Es-

entially, Colerider play Dan Rooney playing Dan Rooney. However, it was with Dan's entrance that the "mystery" behind the train's tardiness was brought to the fore: a child was killed by the train.

The child belongs to the radio play—not our studio drama. It may be the fact that Dan's appearance jarred the audience out of its stage play grounding and forced it into Beckett's radio medium that caused what I viewed to be a rupture in the production. From Dan's entrance onward the production lost its spirit and humor. I was surprised and disheartened when Dan's rant concerning "home life, the dusting, sweeping, airing, scrubbing" turned into another Beckett character's tirade: "practice of sports such as tennis football running cycling swimming flying floating riding gliding conating camogie"—you get my point.

I don't know what the newbies thought of Dan playing Dan playing Lucky—well, I take that back—they would not have known that Dan was playing Dan playing Lucky. But it made the end of the production "fizzle" out. Commendably, my non-Beckett-devotee companions were moved by Maddy's vulnerability, amused by the spectacle of the shuffle of actors and the production's creative and often humorous sounds, and hence, were less focused on the "storyline" itself—either one.

What is taken as Beckett's mantra—"No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."—can be applied to Caesar's production of *All That Fall*: it failed to match up to Beckett's incredibly tight standard for a stage production, while at the same time it succeeded as a vibrant, entertaining, and moving "version" of the play.

--Jennifer Jeffers

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<http://www.tcd.ie/drama-film-music/samuel-beckett-summer-school/>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Erik Tonning, Matthew Feldman, Matthijs Engelberts and Dirk van Hulle, eds. *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies (Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui 22)*. Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2010. 483pp.

If there is a division within Beckett studies, it lies in a controversy over methodology. Perhaps its most public – and bloody – manifestation can be witnessed in the exchange between Matthew Feldman and Garin Dowd, in the pages of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, over Feldman's claim that Beckett studies should adopt a model of Popperian "falsifiability" as a yardstick for determining the value of contributions to the field. Put more gently, it represents a split between archival and theoretical work and the scholars who perform each, a polarisation that pervades Beckett criticism without fully structuring it. It doesn't structure it, because there are, of course, important points of overlap and many ways of making these two sides touch, strategies that have been explored by any number of excellent scholars seeking the middle ground.

Nonetheless, it is probably fair to say that the *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies* seminar, under the stewardship of Erik Tonning and Feldman himself, was conceived as a forum for the more archival, empiricist strand of Beckett research. Held annually at the University of Oxford since 2005, this series is a central event on the Beckett scholarly calendar, and has provided a forum for excellent work by scholars at all levels. It also represents a sustained attempt to see just what kinds of scholarly and critical results can be produced by a closer scrutiny of archival material and by locating Beckett within "falsifiable" contexts: an opportunity, in other words, to move beyond the polemical and into the applied. The 2010 issue of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, which collects twenty-five papers from this seminar series alongside five "free" papers and an interview with Rosemary Pountney, bears out both the high quality of the series, and the seminar's central position in key methodological debates within Beckett studies.

The papers in this volume represent an important contribution to on-going attempts to situate Beckett's work within its cultural and intellectual contexts. The Beckettian "debts" outlined range widely, from re-evaluations of the role of familiar influences such as Joyce, Yeats, and Schopenhauer, to the revival or discovery of under-appreciated or under-studied connections, including Maeterlinck, Bataille, and Bunyan. The strongest essays here are those that move from solid archival work to genuinely interesting or useful critical insights – a difficult maneuver that can bear wonderful fruit. In this regard, the seminar conveners offer exemplary papers. Feldman's analysis of the history of

Beckett's engagement with philosophy makes a convincing case for the centrality of the subject/object relation to Beckett's philosophical reading, an insight with some importance for readings of his texts and critical pieces of the 1930s onwards. Tonning's analysis of the role of Christian mysticism on Beckett ably tackles the vexed issue of influence in the late works, for which the copious note-taking of the 1930s is only a distant memory. His argument for the ongoing echoes of Christian mysticism as late as *Ill Seen Ill Said* is both convincing and thought-provoking, and offers a useful new frame for considering the question of the mind/body relationship in Beckett's work.

Many other papers make similarly important contributions. Seán Kennedy's wonderful exploration of pronatalism and reproduction in Yeats and Beckett, in light of political rhetoric in the Irish Free State, is an important addition to the growing body of work that seeks to historicize Beckett, of which Kennedy is one of the forerunners. A trio of papers by Peter Fifield, Elsa Baroghel, and Shane Weller on *Endgame/Fin de Partie* and various permutations of sadism and psychoanalysis resonate wonderfully together to illuminate a range of sources and contexts, from Bataille to Schopenhauer to Ernest Jones, for the central dynamics of this play. David Tucker offers a subtle reading of Geulincx's influence on Beckett's work of the 1930s and 1940s, which offers an excellent model for approaching the broader questions of how we approach Beckett's use of philosophy. Paul Stewart, reading Beckett through Schopenhauer and Schiller, offers an excellent contribution to discussions about Beckett's aesthetics. His linking of sexual and aesthetic reproduction also makes it an interesting companion piece to Kennedy's paper.

The "Legacies" section of this volume offers an equally stimulating array of papers, although, at just over half the length of the "Debts," it is a little disappointing that more attention was not paid to the wealth of current work on Beckett's influence on subsequent generations of writers, artists, composers, filmmakers, critics and literary theorists. Nonetheless, what is there is excellent, due in part to an apparent loosening of theme and methodology in this section. The papers that result are far more diverse than the preceding section, with some only questionably touching on the issue of influence. There are, of course, some wonderful contributions on precisely that question, many of which break genuinely new ground, including Mary Bryden's essay on Beckett and Cixous, and Mark Nixon's on Beckett's influence on Swiss writers Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Daniel Katz's excellent study of artist Robert Smithson in relation to Beckett, the local and the place/placelessness problem similarly sheds new light on both Beckett and Smithson, and chimes nicely with David Addyman's persuasive and elegant exploration of the ambiguous nature of place in Beckett's drama.

Straying further from the "Beckett and *x*" model of

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debts and legacies are two of the best contributions to this volume. Steven Connor's extremely enjoyable essay on Beckett's relationship to scholarship itself is timely and entertaining. Laura Salisbury's brilliant discussion of the affinities between the science behind the noise/signal distinction, and Beckett's blurring of these lines to aesthetic effect, almost entirely abandons questions of direct influence in either direction, but nonetheless emerges as perhaps the best paper in this volume: a witty, erudite and extremely useful contribution to our understanding of how Beckett's texts, particularly his later texts, function.

Taken as a whole, this volume goes beyond these impressive individual contributions, to offer an invaluable occasion to consider what we gain and what we lose from this methodological approach, and to ask what we want Beckett studies to look like in the future. In many of these papers, particularly in the "Debts" section, there is a tantalizing sense that we are reading preparatory work towards a larger and more detailed project. There is a real sense here that this kind of archive-focused work on influence is becoming a key methodological tool for scholars working on a wide range of different projects. The specificity and attention to detail that this can provide is borne out by many of these papers, as is the—sometimes unrealized—addition that this can provide to critical, as well as historical, understandings of Beckett. In this sense, there is no doubt that this work is a valuable contribution to the field.

Nonetheless, this approach does produce a very particular view of Beckett and his works that is not without its costs. Essentially, the Beckett that arises from the archive is a Beckett unavoidably focused around the figure of Beckett the man. This work produces, therefore, a rather biographical mode of criticism—where biography is taken in the broadest sense of that term, on the model of Knowlson perhaps, to include his intellectual inheritances and his reading. In this context, Alistair Hird's paper on Beckett's use and abuse in debates about the "death of the author" is particularly apt, for this mode of criticism does seem to revive the old critical question of what role we accord to the author and his psychology. Shane Weller's irreproachable essay, for instance, ends with the point that Beckett perhaps treated his writing as self-therapy. If this is the case, it does raise the question of what our role as critics might be before such a text, and to what extent we are invited or even obliged to read the man from the text. This emphasis on the individual author perhaps also accounts for two surprising weak spots in this volume—the absence, with the exception of Kennedy's excellent paper, of work on history; and the relative paucity of work on Beckett's legacies.

This tightening of focus has other effects, too. The most obvious and most serious is the loss of work that studies affinity rather than influence, and so might give us a broader sense of how ideas are developed in a given cultural milieu. Laura Salisbury's essay is a wonderful testament to the potential productivity of such approaches, while

Peter Fifield's meticulous account of Beckett and Bataille seems to strain at the edges, tantalizingly concluding with a sense of what an affinity-based study of these authors might reveal of the intellectual climate of post-war France. In both cases, it is clear that there are other, valuable ways of placing Beckett in context that pass through but do not end with the archive.

This volume is a wonderful contribution to Beckett scholarship, both for the quality of the essays that it contains, and for the speculation that it may provoke about the future direction of the field. As the *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies* seminar enters its seventh year in 2011, with Peter Fifield and John Bolin as new co-conveners, it is apt that this volume has appeared in time to serve both as a tribute to the wonderful work of Tønning and Feldman over the past six years, and as a promise of its continuing function as an important forum for new scholarship on Beckett.

--Alys Moody

Patrick Bixby. *Samuel Beckett and the Postcolonial Novel* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 238 pp. \$75.

Patrick Bixby's study of Beckett's fiction stands at the junction of two important currents in Beckett criticism. One current repositions Beckett in relation to Irish writing and to Irish history, querying any reductive conception of him as a "cosmopolitan" or "international" modernist. In this regard, Bixby builds on important work by David Lloyd and Declan Kiberd, among others (though Kiberd's discussion of Beckett in *Inventing Ireland* is strangely absent in Bixby's book). The other current revises earlier existentialist and philosophical modes of reception, and moves, in the title phrase of Peter Boxhall's influential essay, "towards a political reading" of Beckett's work. Responding skillfully to these existing movements in the field, Bixby has made an original and valuable contribution to Beckett studies.

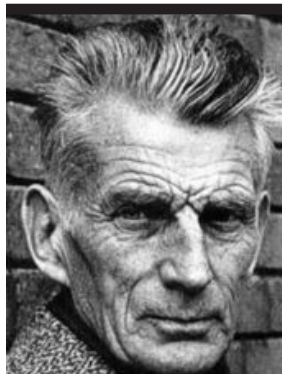
As the title suggests, Bixby's analytical framework takes its coordinates from postcolonial theory, especially those strands most indebted to post-structuralism. The theory of "minor literature" and of de- and re- "territorialisation" developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and subsequently elaborated by Lloyd, provides Bixby's principal tool, but Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, parody and hybridity also play a role in his analysis. In this account, Beckett's novels, from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written in 1932 but unpublished until 1992) to the *Trilogy* (195–53), represent a sustained assault on the cultural nationalist ideology that dominated the independent Irish state in its first decades. However, this assault is not confined to a darkly comic satire on the intellectual insularity and political timidity of the Free State—though there is, of course, an abundance of such satire in the early nov-

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els, especially *Murphy* (1938). As a “minor” artist writing from a deliberately marginal position within a “majority” literature, Beckett’s challenge goes much further, fatally undermining the liberal humanist conception of a coherent human identity that is central to both the imperial and anti-colonial versions of modernity. The novels ingeniously dismantle any notion of an authentic, coherent individual and communal identity, and the concept of an identity securely rooted in place, while also repudiating the Enlightenment narratives of self-formation and of historical progress. In short, the novels do not merely contest the legitimacy of post-independence Ireland, but also undermine the ideological foundations of colonial modernity, which post-colonial nationalism merely replicated in equally oppressive forms.

Beckett’s novels achieved this subversive goal through

their formal experimentalism. His fiction playfully ironizes and parodies those discourses which constructed the modern category of the human. Chief among the modes of writing to which Beckett’s fiction lays siege is the realist novel, and in particular the *bildungsroman*—the form which, as Bixby points out, narrates “the emergence of the bourgeois individual in modern European society which occurs simultaneously with the emergence of the bourgeois nation-state” while also articulating “the Enlightenment narratives of progress and development” (33). While Beckett’s parodic relationship with the European and Irish *bildungsroman* tradition (most notably Joyce’s *Portrait*) is the keynote in Bixby’s reading of the novels, he also demonstrates Beckett’s complex engagement with a wide range of other, non-literary discourses, such as anthropology, travel-writing, landscape painting, art criticism, and



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the pastoral. Devoting a chapter each to *Dream, Murphy*, and *Watt* and one to the Trilogy, Bixby fuses a subtle, astute close reading of the novels with an impressively broad and theoretically rich discussion of literary, intellectual, and political history.

This study could have been strengthened by a more sustained engagement with Irish scholarship. Bixby's account of Ireland's descent into economic and cultural insularity in the post-independence decades relies heavily on a small selection of historians, mainly F.S.L. Lyons, Terence Brown, and R.F. Foster. While these are authoritative figures, especially Brown, theirs has by no means been the final word on this period. Most peculiarly, partition features hardly at all in his discussion. In addition, Bixby seems unaware of the irony that some of these historians have most fervently contested the application of postcolonial theory to Ireland. More generally, Bixby does not acknowledge the complex and contested evolution of postcolonial analysis in Irish studies, nor the varieties of postcolonial theory beyond his chosen poststructuralist mode.

Predictably, in Bixby's account the failures of early independence are embodied in the figure of Eamon De Valera. Or more accurately, "Eamon De Valera" since his construction of this figure tends towards caricature and takes no account of recent revaluations of the historical Dev. Crucially, Bixby does not focus on De Valera's failure to effectively move from decolonization to liberation (in Edward Said's formulation), nor does he offer a Marxist or socialist republican critique of the Irish state's conservative adherence to a capitalist political model. Instead De Valera is essentially faulted for his rhetorical adoption of a homogenizing cultural nationalist discourse of authenticity that merely reformulated the oppressive tropes of colonial discourse. In other words, the main problem with Dev appears to be that he was not a poststructuralist *avant la lettre*.

By contrast, the great strength of Beckett's writing appears to be that he was. This is probably the most serious flaw in this otherwise exemplary work. Bixby's analysis is predicated on bringing some strands of postcolonial theory to bear on Beckett's writing, and thereby illuminating his intervention as a writer of fiction into the historical conditions of postcolonial Ireland. However, the actual unfolding of the analysis produces a different result, one where Beckett's writing uncannily prefigures the precise dimensions of the later theory. This Beckett is uniformly on the side of difference and hybridity, always alert to the oppressive effects of colonial and, especially, cultural nationalist discourse; to misquote Jan Kott's famous title, this is Beckett, our contemporary. The recurrence of certain phrases illustrates the problem: Beckett's fiction is invariably "subverting," "challenging," "undermining," "contesting," or "dismantling." Tellingly, the novels regularly "anticipate" and "predict" later twentieth-century developments in cultural theory. While appreciating

Bixby's spirited and welcome demonstration of Beckett's "critical utopianism," one nevertheless wished at times for a more dialectical view of Beckett's enmeshment in the messiness of history.

--Michael Cronin

Eric P. Levy, *Trapped in Thought: A Study of the Beckettian Mentality*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007. 248pp. \$24.95.

The title of this thought-provoking and wide-ranging study is perhaps a little misleading. This is not, by any means, a psychological study of the subjective turn of mind which has bequeathed us the Beckettian universe. Nor does it fully account for the way of thinking behind that universe or the mental inclinations and character of its creator. Rather, Levy has attempted to explain Beckettian ambivalence by tracing, in minute detail, the different ways in which "the Beckettian self is an unstable compound of expression and silence, presence and absence, content and emptiness." In his expert negotiation of the spaces between these terms, Levy proves himself an excellent guide to the terrain even if his analysis falls short of the psychological insights his title implicitly promises.

Levy's much earlier (1980) study *Beckett and the Voice of the Species* promises humanist insights into Beckett's voicing of humanity's despair but in practice, neatly side-steps such expectations by confirming Beckett's vision as "post-metaphysical" where the voice of the species emerges from a world in which "the very foundation of personal identity has been eaten away." In not dissimilar fashion, Levy's most recent study confounds our expectations in situating itself in a decidedly post-humanist environment. Not unlike H. Porter Abbott's suggestion of "self-writing" or "autography" in his *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (1996) as a way of re-organizing (auto)biographical readings of Beckett in a post-humanist environment, so Levy reconfigures what we would normally think of as "mentality" (mental outlook, viewpoint, attitude) by offering an analysis which dwells as much on subjectivity and subject-object relations as it does on the mentality of the title. As with Porter Abbott's musings on autobiography in which Porter Abbott creatively redefines his terms, so Levy uses a range of terms—Beckettian mimesis, Beckettian mentality, or Beckettian awareness—as mobile ciphers for what he sees as a consistent mental attitude involving "the representation of an autonomous mind or, more precisely, a *mentality*, a mode of construing experience that seeks only the reinforcement of its own preconceptions."

The keyword here is "autonomous." Rather than attempt to analyze "Beckettian awareness" in terms of this or that psychological or philosophical theory, Levy accepts the Beckettian mentality *on its own terms*. And importantly,

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the Beckettian vision is not so much a subjective description of the world as an all-consuming “disposition” or “mentality” which “claims universal validity” and which experiences its own unique sense of terror, abandonment, and fragmentation as the fulcrum of experience which it cannot escape from. The best example here is the vision of the madman described by Hamm in *Endgame*. The subjective vision of the end of the world is contrasted with the “objective” vision of “the sails of the herring fleet” and the loveliness of the world. But for Levy, the whole play is mental so that “the emphasis on external vacancy signifies not the literal destruction of the outer world but the inability or refusal of the mentality represented to acknowledge anything outside the concerns preoccupying its own interiority.” The refusal of the madman to witness the “objective” world holds a mirror to the refusal of Beckettian awareness or consciousness to inhabit a space outside its own tortured confines.

The utility of Levy’s reading is immediately apparent. Just as Porter Abbott has advanced us well beyond simplistic psycho-biography by skillful redeployment of terminology, so Levy postulates a Beckettian awareness which is only tangentially related to the humanist Beckett who voices a version of the so-called “human condition.” Thus, for Levy, the linguistic indeterminacy of a text such as *The Unnamable* is attributable to a subjective position—a mentality—which does not equate directly with the pseudo-being in a jar of that novel who lacks a proper name. As Levy writes, “The Unnamable is not the literary representation of a person, for he lacks a body and the world he inhabits has no reality apart from his own way of formulating it. As such, he is no more than a mentality or way of thinking about life.” In such a reading, “the conventional distinctions between subjective and objective, mental and physical no longer apply” – there is no self-world interface and the entity or language pattern known as “The Unnamable” is truly “trapped in thought” because this is what defines his existence. And just as *Endgame* denies us an outside through which to view the vision of the play, likewise the disembodied mentality in *The Unnamable* has no external or internal vantage points with which to escape the deluge of words he has become.

In the end, Levy’s reading can be seen as complimentary rather than revolutionary in relation to other recent studies. For example, Andrew Gibson in his study of Beckett and Badiou reads *The Unnamable* as a “rage against *doxa*” or received opinion and as inaugurating the possibility of an event amidst the pathos of intermittency. Levy’s approach neither confirms nor denies Gibson’s (admittedly very different) reading. Likewise, the widely-held view expressed by Dina Sherzer, that *The Unnamable* is “a text about language” is not ultimately incompatible with Levy’s approach. Levy’s study seems to suggest that there can be thought and language of the most self-reflexive and anguished kind without a thinking subject or objec-

tive world to contain that thought. This is the meaning of Levy’s “Beckettian mentality” which offers an interesting variation and indeed critique on certain poststructuralist approaches to the *Trilogy*. It also goes to the heart of Cartesian debates about the thinking subject with which Levy engages in his chapter on The Unnamable entitled “The Metaphysics of Beckettian Introspection.” Indeed, this title might serve as a more appropriate subtitle for the book as a whole given that Levy’s “Beckettian awareness” or “Beckettian mentality” is as much a metaphysical position or awareness as anything else. As a response to Beckett’s work which accepts the terms in which Beckett chose to frame his art and which accepts “the whole ghastly business” of Beckettian expression, Levy’s book deserves an attentive readership.

--Ben Keatinge

Samuel Beckett. *no wła nie co. Dramaty i proza w przekładzie Antoniego Libery* (trans. Antoni Libera). Warszawa: Pa stwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2010. 488pp. PLN 55

The new edition of Antoni Libera’s translations is well on its way to re-shaping the Polish reception of Beckett’s work. By selecting the phrase *what is the word* for the title of the collection, Libera stresses the importance of Beckett’s late, non-dramatic output. The translations of *Company* (*Towarzystwo*), *Stirrings Still* (*Podrygi*), and *what is the word* (*no wła nie co*) are likely to reach a more general public for the first time in a volume that will probably establish a new Beckett canon in Poland. The book consists of ten plays (*Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, *Rough for Theatre II*, *Comedy*, *Not I*, *Footfalls*, *Ohio Impromptu*, and *Catastrophe*), which are followed by ten prose narratives (*First Love*, *The Expelled*, *The End*, *From an Abandoned Work*, *The Lost Ones*, *Lessness*, *neither*, *Company*, *Stirrings Still*, and *what is the word*). Even if this selection provokes some critical reaction (why was there no room for *Breath?*; are not both *neither* and *what is the word* poetry rather than prose?, and, above all, what about *More Pricks Than Kicks* and all the work before *Waiting for Godot*?), its effect will be powerful: there is a good chance that Beckett will cease to be known merely as the nihilistic “absurdist,” “Irish” Nobel Prize-winning author of a single work, *Waiting for Godot*.

The hardcover edition of *no wła nie co* is a rare treasure for all book-lovers—its high quality rivals that of Libera’s novels, *Madame* and *Godot i jego cień*. The photograph on the front cover already gives priority to a book over the lean figure of Beckett standing in shadow somewhere in the background. In the foreground, and in full light, is a notebook (a book?), placed squarely on a chair. Shades of black and white dominate the rectangular cover (whose

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long, narrow shape emphasises Beckett's height), and they are oddly counterpointed with the unfortunate, perhaps, pinkish purple of the letters of the title and the translator's name.

The aesthetic quality of the volume is matched by its high editorial standard. There is no doubt that *no właśnie co* presents Beckett as seen by Antoni Libera. His authoritative translations, preceded by a short introductory note and accompanied by an interview carried out by Sebastian Duda, are furnished with endnotes (translator's comments), the whole constituting a coherent volume in which Libera not only provides his overwhelming vision of Beckett's oeuvre but also presents his strategies as the translator and interpreter of bilingual texts. (Textual variants are referred to and the translator's decisions explained.) The only potential danger in such an integrated approach is that the reader will be tempted to mistake Libera's perception of Beckett with the vision expressed by Samuel Beckett in his French and English originals (in fact, this is an issue that frequently creates some confusion in Polish criticism).

Paradoxically, then, the indisputable aesthetic value of the translated Beckett weakens its power to provoke multidimensional and frequently contradictory artistic/academic debate. Translated, analyzed, discussed, and interpreted (I should add: staged and directed) by the same man, Antoni Libera, Beckett has become a clear point of reference for Polish literature and theatre (the most obvious example being the novelistic output of Antoni Libera). Still, for obvious reasons, Libera's authoritative, if coherent and potent, version of Beckett would not be possible without firm interpretative decisions, which often determine the shape of his translations. In many cases, analytical aporia are weakened, reduced, or eliminated. This results, at times, in an interpretative clarity in the translated text which is not necessarily a feature of the original version(s). *what is the word*, serves here as a perfect example. Translated as *no właśnie co*, it eludes the demands of strict semantic equivalence between original and translation for the sake of rhythmic qualities. In an endnote, Libera admits that in this case he reduced the semantic potential of the phrase and decided to preserve its rhythm. However, though the endnotes and comments are highly detailed (64 pages), Libera's interpretative decisions are not always as explicitly marked as this one.

The main value of *no właśnie co* is twofold. On the one hand, the quality of the new translations of texts such as *Company* (*Towarzystwo*) and *Stirrings Still* (*Podrygi*) provides a solid basis for introducing Beckett's late prose to Polish ground (in spite of my reservations to the title words, these are without a doubt aesthetically the best translations to date of any Beckett text into Polish). On the other hand, by furnishing his Beckett canon with such a complete analytical-interpretative commentary, Antoni Libera makes a definite statement, which will remain an important point of reference for a younger generation of

Beckett enthusiasts. By these I mean both scholars (Momro, Mackiewicz, Lachman, Dobrzyński, Ojrzyńska, Nalewajk, Wojtyna, and Lutostański), and those who experiment with Beckett drama in their theatre studios (Bocian, Wójcik, Więcek, Nalepa, to mention only those who are working on his drama in the city of Sopot).

--Tomasz Wiśniewski

New and Forthcoming

- Astro, Alan. *Understanding Samuel Beckett*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011. ISBN-10: 9781611170047, ISBN-13: 978-1611170047.
- Beckett, Samuel, ed. Lois Overbeck, George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Dan Gunn. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 2, 1941-1956*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN-10: 0521867940, ISBN-13: 978-0521867948.
- Carpenter, Charles. *The Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett: A Selective Bibliography of Publications About His Plays and Their Conceptual Foundations*. London: Continuum, 2011) ISBN-13: 978-1441184214.
- De Vos, Laurens. *Cruelty and Desire in the Modern Theater: Antonin Artaud, Sarah Kane, and Samuel Beckett*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011. ISBN-10: 1611470447, ISBN-13: 978-1611470444.
- Dilks, Stephen John. *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011. ISBN-10: 0815632541, ISBN-13: 978-0815632542.
- Forrester, Viviane and Francois-Marie Banier. *Beckett*. London: Steidl 2011. ISBN-10: 3865219837, ISBN-13: 978-3865219831.
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is with pleasure that I take over from Richard Begam as the new president of the SBS. This is a huge honor for me, since I know how strong, competent and formidable the group of Beckett scholars has become over the years. I am proud to belong to the group officially. If I may begin by a confession, I'll just say that I have not always been a Beckett scholar, but for a long time a Joyce scholar. However, I did not come to Beckett via Joyce, as some of my friends have done. I didn't follow the example of mentors like David Hayman or Bernard Benstock, excellent Joyce scholars who kept a soft spot for Beckett while publishing mostly on Joyce. Even if, for a long time, I had to acknowledge that I was above all a "Joycean," I had a nagging doubt: would I have liked Joyce if I had had the opportunity to meet him? My answer was always "No." On the other hand, I felt that I would have liked Beckett even more if I could have met him. I never did, I say this to my regret, but we had a brief correspondence when I edited a collection of essays, *Beckett avant Beckett*, with my friend Jacques Aubert. That was in 1984. Much earlier, in 1969, as I was a *normalien* posted in London, teaching French at King's College and writing a Master's thesis on *Finnegans Wake*, I discovered by chance Adorno's famous essay on *Endgame*.¹ Needless to say, I understood almost nothing at first, but this nothing kept exerting its power on me. My baffled admiration for the dialectics of negativity made me want to see the play itself and read more essays by the German philosopher who had just died in Frankfurt amidst a leftist students' rebellion. Luckily, I had the opportunity to do that the following year, a year that I spent in Germany and during which I imbibed as much Benjamin and Adorno as I could. This allowed me to see that passions ran high among German students who argued vehemently for or against Adorno's neo-Marxism in a seminar devoted to Kafka and modernism at Hamburg University. I even managed to glance at Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, just published then, and saw that the name of Beckett recurred regularly in it.

It may be that I belong to a generation that came to Beckett by way of theory. But it may also have looked like counter-theory. Unlike the generation of Alain Badiou, who recognized in Beckett many crucial links with issues discussed by existentialist philosophy² (he was disciple of Sartre as a young man), we tended to read Beckett through Adorno's negative dialectics. And it was Adorno who showed us that Beckett's plays and novels staged a radical parody of existentialism in general, and a debunking of Heidegger in particular. I do find Badiou's and Adorno's readings still relevant today, and assume that they are complementary despite surface contradictions that reveal different sensibilities. They testify to Beckett's central role in the last century, and to his lasting impact now, be it via an insistence on courage and ethics as Badiou sees it, or by presenting autonomous aesthetic forms that by their very lack of meaning lead to a sweeping critique of modern alienation, as Adorno argued.

If today Beckett has emerged as the most important modernist author of the last century, to the point that he has replaced the two literary masters that he had chosen for himself, Proust and Joyce, in our canons, it is less because there are situations that can be called "Beckettian" when they are not exactly "Kafkaian" (whereas one rarely hears someone say that a given incident is "Proustian" or "Joycean," unless it is in a trivialized notion of "epiphanies") than because he has asserted the durable value of a modernism that has been misunderstood but is now given its proper meaning and scope. One of these "Beckettian" situations happened recently when the persons who had gathered at the call of the Beckett society at the last MLA meeting were waiting in a room for Pascale Casanova. Casanova was our main speaker, and a second panel was supposed to respond to her work. However, Richard Begam and I had been informed one month earlier of the fact that she had not begun teaching at Duke University in January as she had assumed, hence was unable to make the trip from Paris to LA and back in the short time at her disposal. That time, the waiting was not on vain, since Thomas Cousineau, Richard Begam and I gave presentations on Beckett and philosophy. Since a second act will have to repeat the first but with a difference, Pascale Casanova has agreed to be our guest as soon as she has settled in the US.

I would like to mention that the next MLA meeting in Seattle will allow us to hear two distinguished Beckett specialists: Daniel Gunn, from the American University in Paris, who will talk about his editorial work on the second volume of letters, forthcoming later in 2011, and Mark Nixon, from Reading University, who will present his forthcoming book on Beckett's German diaries, which should be published this spring, and also more generally survey the treasures contained in the Beckett archives at Reading. By a happy coincidence, after having computed all the votes for the new Board members who have been elected, it turns out that Mark Nixon has been voted President-Elect from 2011-2012 and then President from 2013-2014. The other new member elected to the Executive Board from 2011 through 2014 is Katherine Weiss (East Tennessee State University). All my congratulations to Mark and Katherine!

And all my good wishes to all of you,
Jean-Michel Rabaté

1 Theodor W. Adorno, "Trying to understand *Endgame*," *Notes to Literature*, vol. I, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991.

2 Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, ed. and transl. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power, Manchester, Clinamen Press, 2003.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Michael G. Cronin teaches in the Department of English at NUI Maynooth, Ireland. His *Impure Thoughts: Sexuality, Catholicism and Literature in Twentieth-Century Ireland* is forthcoming from Manchester University Press.

Jennifer Jeffers is Professor of English and Associate Dean of the College of Graduate Studies at Cleveland State University. In addition to numerous articles, Professor Jeffers is the author of *Beckett's Masculinity* (Palgrave Macmillan, November 2009), *Britain Colonized: Hollywood's Appropriation of British Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, paperback forthcoming), *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century: Gender, Bodies, and Power* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; paperback, 2008), *Uncharted Space: The End of Narrative* (2001), editor of *Samuel Beckett* (1998), and co-editor of *Contextualizing Aesthetics: From Plato to Lyotard* (1998). Professor Jeffers is the Acquisitions and General Editor of "New Interpretations of Samuel Beckett in the Twenty-First Century" (Palgrave Macmillan).

Benjamin Keatinge is Head of English at the South East European University, Tetovo, Macedonia where he teaches English literature. He holds a doctorate on Samuel Beckett from Trinity College Dublin and he has published articles on Beckett in the *Irish University Review*, the *Journal of Modern Literature* as well as in a recent collection of essays on *Endgame / Fin de Partie* published by Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009. He recently published (as co-editor) a volume of critical essays on Irish poet Brian Coffey titled *Other Edens: The Life and Work of Brian Coffey* (Irish Academic Press, 2010).

David Malcolm is Professor of English Literature, Chair of the Department of Literary Studies and Vice-Director in the English Institute of the University of Gdansk. He has written books on Jean Rhys, Ian McEwan, Graham Swift and John McGahern. He co-edited the *Blackwell Companion to British and Irish Short Fiction* (2008). He writes reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Bogdan Manojlovitch was a personal friend and Parisian neighbor of Samuel Beckett, whom he met in the late 1950s around the Belgrade premiere of his Serbian translation of *Endgame*. He was responsible for installing a bronze bust of Beckett in the center of the Paris City Hall, 14th arrondissement (near the playwright's former home) in honor of Beckett's centenary. Manojlovitch is the President of the Association Samuel Beckett Paris 14 (www.beckett-association-paris14.com).

Alys Moody is a doctoral candidate in English at Jesus College, University of Oxford, where she is completing a dissertation on the aesthetic functions of starvation in Samuel Beckett, Paul Auster and J. M. Coetzee. She is also an editor of *Limit(e) Beckett*, an online bilingual journal of Beckett studies.

Alexandra Poulain is a Professor of Irish literature and drama at Charles de Gaulle University in Lille. Her latest publication is the book *Endgame ou le théâtre mis en pièces* (Paris, CNED-PUF, 2009), co-authored with Elisabeth Angel-Perez.

Carrie J. Preston is an Assistant Professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Boston University. Her book, *Modernism's Mythic Pose*, will be published by Oxford University Press in July 2011. Her article on Beckett as a director and the trope of submission in his work, "Taking Direction from Beckett," will appear in the forthcoming volume, *Back to the Beckett Text*.

Anthony Roche is an Associate Professor and Head of Drama in the School of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin. His recent publications include *Contemporary Irish Drama* (2nd edition, 2009) and *Brian Friel: Theatre and Politics* (2011), both published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Tomasz Wiśniewski is the author of *Kształt literacki dramatu Samuela Becketta* (*The Literary Shape of Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Works*, Universitas 2006) and several articles on modern drama and poetry. He co-edited special issues on Beckett for the literary bimonthly *Topos* (no. 6/2006, 1/2010 and 5/2010). He has organised two conferences/festivals on Beckett: 'Samuel Beckett: Tradition-Avant-garde' (Olsztyn: Poland, 2008); 'Back to the Beckett Text' (Sopot: Poland, 2010).

CALL FOR PAPERS:
Samuel Beckett and the "State" of Ireland Conference
8-9 July 2011 at University College Dublin

"Famous throughout the civilised world and the Irish Free State"
~Murphy

"I have also decided to remind myself of my present state before embarking
on my stories. I think this is a mistake."
~Malone Dies

Samuel Beckett's relationship to his home country of Ireland has always been a curious interaction. Years of criticism interpreted his Parisian exile and switch to French as Beckett "turning his back on Ireland." However, recent scholarship has opened up a much wider excavation of Beckett's connections with Ireland. This is evident in a number of recent publications which interrogate Beckett's relationship to his native country, in particular Emilie Morin's *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness* (2009) and *Beckett and Ireland* (2010), edited by Sean Kennedy. In addition, the publication in 2009 of the first volume of Beckett's letters, covering the period from 1929 to 1940, has re-iterated for scholars the lasting influences and shaping experiences that Ireland represented for Beckett. The staging for the first time of a conference solely devoted to Beckett's relationship to Ireland aims to encourage an exchange of ideas which will inform ongoing critical efforts to construct an Irish Beckett.

Hosted by The Humanities Institute of Ireland, this two day conference aims to host a wide selection of both graduate and professional papers with the aim of highlighting new and dynamic work being done on Samuel Beckett. Proposals are sought from researchers working in the field in general and are particularly welcome from those working in disciplines outside of the traditional confines of Beckett studies, especially from those working on Beckett in the Irish language. Keynote speakers will be established scholars within the field.

Topics will include but are not limited to:

Representations of Ireland in Beckett
Beckett and Irish Studies
Beckett and Irish Drama
Beckett as an Irish Protestant
Beckett and the Free State
Beckett and the Irish Language
Representations of Landscape
Exile and Home

Abstracts not exceeding 300 words for 20 minute papers
should be emailed to:

Beckettconference2011@gmail.com The deadline for proposals is 6 May 2011.





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, 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:
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Checks made out to the Samuel Beckett Society are accepted in the following forms: U.S. dollars drawn on U.S. banks, or a money orders in U.S. 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.

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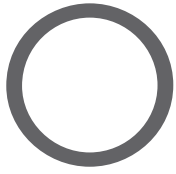
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Please note that all materials for the Fall issue must be received by September 1, for the Spring issue by March 1.



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