

**Review:** *College Literature*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (Fall 1981). "Samuel Beckett: Special Issue." West Chester State College, West Chester, Pa. 19380.

**Breon Mitchell**

Those interested in Beckett will want to turn immediately to p. 310 of the special issue of *College Literature* which celebrates his seventy-fifth birthday, where a hitherto unpublished text of a somewhat unusual nature may be found. It consists of two paragraphs and is untitled except for a symbol identical to the number "8" above the first paragraph and the symbol for infinity above the second. The first symbol is identified in the editor's note (but not by Beckett) as signifying an "indefinite number," a usage unknown to my colleagues in mathematics. Moreover the title "Crisscross to Infinity" which heads the text is not Beckett's. Since the text describes a sandy figure-eight path up and down what is presumably a hill in the first section, and a similarly-shaped path winding back and forth across barren bedrock in the second, the symbols might well both represent infinity. What is clear is that each of the two sections is structured so as to suggest infinite repetition of the text itself, both as individual units and in relation to each other. It is a text which will be of special interest to those concerned with physical movement and structure in Beckett's work.

The somewhat odd location of this text toward the very end of the issue may be the result of an intentional juxtaposition with the "Notes and Discussion" section which immediately follows. Intentional or not, the confrontation is a happy one, for Joseph Hassett's brief note on the central concept of "strange loops" in *Gödel, Escher, Bach* by Douglas Hofstadter, seems to offer a direct commentary on Beckett's new text as well.

The bulk of the issue is, of course, devoted to scholarly essays, and begins with Enoch Braters analysis of the problematics of narrative perspective in *Watt*. Brater suggests that a careful reading of the novel reveals the impossibility of identifying a single narrator for all four parts, thus denying the general assumption (repeated, for example, by John Fletcher later in this same issue) that "Sam" is the narrator of the whole. The essay is unfortunately marred by numerous typographical errors. Readers should be warned that few of the quotations are given with complete accuracy, and on occasion render a sense directly opposite to that of the original text. The complex discussion of the chronological sequence of the four sections of *Watt* is marred by similarly confusing typos, the order 1-2-3-4 being given twice, for example, when 1-2-4-3 was intended.

Since *College Literature* is meant as an aid to classroom teaching in American universities, its pages are unlikely to offer much new to the specialist. Michael Mundhenk's attempt to justify an interest in Beckett from a Marxist perspective seems aimed primarily at unenlightened Marxists. I assume his references to Marxist critics are more accurate than his assertion that Murphy died by asphyxiation. J. D. O'Hara's lively and informal style comes as a welcome relief in the following essay, on Beckett and Schopenhauer. I found the first half in particular an excellent overview. Philosophically-inclined readers should note that Joseph Browne's detailed and useful bibliographical essay in the same issue includes two articles which had already dealt in a major way with Schopenhauer and Beckett, neither of which is mentioned by O'Hara.

John Fletcher's survey of Beckett's literary development, based solely on the prose works, provides the best general essay for potential classroom use. Fletcher divides Beckett's work into three periods, revealing a progression away from an interest in the world, toward an increasing absorption with language itself, a view which would be readily agreed to by many Beckett scholars. (The stages themselves are uncannily reminiscent of the three sections of Canetti's *Auto-da-Fe*, a novel which has been tellingly compared with *Murphy* by Marilyn Lovett.) Although *Company* clearly departs from Fletcher's schema, he nevertheless rounds off his discussion nicely by pointing to it as a return to the beginnings, prompted perhaps by the appearance of the Bair biography. *All That Fall*, a text which Fletcher would have found a thorny problem had he included dramatic works in his discussion, is briefly treated by Gregory A. Schirmer in the remaining essay of the issue.

**Review:** Samuel Beckett Special Issue of *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 1984. 156 pp. Room J210, University College, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland. £5.00 post free.

*Nicholas Zurbrugg*

Criticism seldom surprises. There are not that many ways in which the things that Beckett's critics are 'trying in vain to say' may be 'tried in vain to be said'. In this respect it is refreshing to read the special Beckett issue of the *Irish University Review*, an aptly subtitled 'Journal of Irish Studies' which considers Beckett from a specifically Irish perspective, and as part of a tangibly Irish cultural tradition, rather than as an immaculately conceived representative of 'all humanity'.

Arguably, the 'Humpty-Dumpty' approach is best. The critic needs to sit on the wall, or fence, separating the national and the immaculate, in order to savour both. For example, *Krapp's Last Tape* may well be celebrated as a piece of pure, technological, Post-Modernity, or as a quintessential revelation of Beckett's obscure ethical symbolism, without reference to Ireland or anything Irish. But as Christopher Murray points out, in his survey of 'Beckett Productions in Ireland', the play may also be defined as so much Irish. Taunted by the actor Cyril Cusack's complaint that *Krapp* was a 'piece of Irish Protestant sentimentality', Beckett apparently retorted: 'That's what it's intended to be'. Over and over again, references such as this redirect one 'Back to Beckett's Ireland', rather than simply 'Back to Beckett'.

At best, the briefer contributions make the most of a few more of the Beckettian pebbles that punctilious criticism cannot leave unturned. Roger Little's discussion of 'Beckett's Mentor, Rudmose-Brown', comes up with Beckett's confirmation that Rudmose-Brown 'had no part in the Dante revelation'; David Berman's meditations upon 'Beckett and Berkeley' ponder upon Beckett's assertion that he 'was not influenced by Luce's work on Berkeley'; while Derek Mahon's lucid musings upon the more general qualities of Beckett's poetry sporadically focus upon such minutia as Beckett's claim that he 'never thought' of the ambiguities which Lawrence Harvey imputes to 'Saint-Lô'.

T. P. Dolan's patient analysis of Beckett's departures from 'standard colloquial English' in *All That Fall* establishes Beckett's 'capacity to represent authentic Hiberno-English dialogue', while J. C. C. Mays's study of 'Young Beckett's Irish Roots', considers the extent to which *Murphy* is 'a *roman à clef*, which satirizes and says farewell to the Dublin literary scene'. Tracing the curious dialectic between Beckett's 'dismissal of things Irish', and the omnipresent 'Irishness' arising from 'his detachment from literary forms and language', and from 'the streak of cruelty and violence that runs through his writing along with the humour and elegance', Mays concludes that Beckett partakes both of what one might think of as the peculiarly Irish, diachronic tradition of 'disinheritance', and of the more recent, synchronic tradition of Modernism, which Beckett shares with an international brigade of 'experimental' writers.

Approaching the paradoxes of 'Beckett's case' from the perspective of R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self*, Patrick Wakeling argues that both Beckett's travels and literary travails spring from his 'schzoid make-up'. According to Wakeling, Beckett's destruction of his correspondence from

Joyce and other mentors after his mother's death signals his escape from 'inauthentic' social transactions, and marks the 'illusion of independence' precipitating his mature work; while the disturbing experiments of this work persistently testify to Beckett's 'divided self'. With this pattern in mind, Wakeling concludes that the 'particularity' of Beckett's 'schizoid' vision precludes the claim that his works speak for humanity, or 'those whose minds are less divided than his own'. Arguably, though, it is precisely the bewildering osmosis of the private and the public which makes Beckett's writing so compelling. It hooks us with its general archetypes, and then lures us upon the wild-goose chase of attempting to share what Estragon might define as Beckett's 'private nightmares'.

Seamus Deane's essay on 'Joyce and Beckett' dismisses the concept of 'schizophrenic writing' in order to emphasize the regionality of Beckett's work, insofar as 'Ireland, with its dead language, its deadening politics, its illiberal legislation is the historical correlative of the personal state of nirvana-nullity for which Beckett's people crave'. From this premise, Deane goes on to compare and contrast Joyce and Beckett, both in terms of what they have in common—'exile, experimentation, heroic dedication and Dublin', and in terms of such familiar dichotomies as their respective preoccupation with 'incorporation' and 'impotence'. Rejecting this attempt to place Beckett's work within a national social and literary context, Ben Barnes' account of 'Aspects of Directing Beckett' insists upon the ways in which Beckett's plays demand 'de-personalization' (and one might add, 'de-nationalization'), 'in the service of the accentuated image'.

Without ever explicitly saying as much, Christopher Murray's provocative account of 'Beckett Productions in Ireland' consistently exemplifies this process of 'de-personalization' in a number of striking anecdotes and allusions, such as his reference to A. J. Leventhal's criticism of the "Dubalín" intonation in a 1955 production of *Godot*, on the grounds that 'the author had in mind a universal rather than a regional vision of mankind'. Still more evocative, perhaps, is Murray's quotation from a letter of 28 January 1958, in which Beckett sternly defined his ideal of a 'straight reading' of *All That Fall* in terms which prophetically anticipate the impersonal utterances in *Play*, observing: 'The ideal for me would be a stage in darkness with a spot picking out the faces as required'.

Murray also alludes to Beckett's aforementioned confirmation that *Krapp* epitomizes 'Irish Protestant sentimentality', and for good measure, adds Cyril Cusack's claim that *Happy Days* was, by Beckett's own admission, 'influenced' by his wife, Maureen Cusack's request that he 'write a happy play' after *Krapp*. Further discussion of *Happy Days* leads Murray to quote the *Cork Examiner's* admiration for 'the slightly mad resignation' of Winnie, and this in turn overlaps with the emphasis that writers Aidan Higgins and John Banville similarly place upon the evanescent optimism within Beckett's work.

According to Higgins, Beckett's sense of negation is neutralized by his compulsion for contradiction: 'one doesn't know that [his work] means anything, but he is able to put it in such a way that it is not possible to say that it means nothing either'. In Banville's terms, 'He knows, with Kafka, that so long as we can say, here is the worst, then the worst has not arrived'. While Banville almost certainly inflates Beckett's and Kafka's confidence in what 'we can say', Higgins also surely errs when he suggests that Beckett's characters 'do not complain', as they linger, 'alive after a fashion, even if buried up to their necks'.

For Higgins, Beckett's characters are first and foremost survivors; a 'miracle' that 'they must talk about'. Arguably, the reverse obtains. Involuntary survivors, denied the 'miracle' of death, and, as Higgins remarks, 'preserved in their memories', Beckett's characters talk, not to celebrate survival, but to keep life and memory at bay. Winnie must talk to evade introspection. In this respect, happiness will only be hers when, like the newly dead 'Mouth' in *Not I*, she is buried from toe to top, rather than merely up to the neck. 'Mouth' experiences the reverse of Winnie's trajectory. Rather than sinking into silence, 'Mouth' rises from the grave, reluctantly suffers mental resurrection, and survives again, to complain, again and again.

Like Micheál Ó hAonghusa, a theatre historian, who, as Murray remarks, makes 'no attempt to appropriate Beckett as an Irish writer, one might well define Beckett's ghostly plays as the product of the first dramatist of the space-age', or as plays 'set on the edge of nowhere', where 'society does not exist and man is in a void'. Ultimately, though, this judgement oversimplifies Beckett's achievement. The sense of existing 'nowhere' or anywhere, somewhat like Jarry's *Ubu*, certainly gives Beckett's work its compelling, archetypal mystery. But at the same time, a certain muted Irishness, and still more muted autobiographical overtones, also give Beckett's work that poignant 'Beckettian' flavour for which space-age fictions offer little substitute. The Beckett issue of the *Irish University Review* offers the perfect catalyst for further meditation upon Beckett's national, international and extra-national qualities.

**Review:** Bert O. States, *The Shape of Paradox*. Quantum Books, University of California Press, Berkeley 1982, (120 pp.). and *A Samuel Beckett Reader*, ed. John Calder, Picador original, Pan Books, London, 1984 (282 pp.).

*Dougald McMillan*

Beckett regulars will wonder why thirty years after *Godot*, a Nobel prize, and a very fortunate set of critical introductions to his work there is any need for more Beckett criticism at an introductory level. In the case of the new *Samuel Beckett Reader* edited by Beckett's publisher, John Calder, the answer is clear. Since the appearance of Calder's popular and useful 1967 reader, Beckett has produced works in new forms with difficulties for the general public as great or greater than those of the earlier works. The selections and introductions in the new *Reader* successfully relate the recent works to the earlier ones and provide justification and understanding of Beckett's whole corpus by comparisons to music, painting, and Romantic literature.

The reason for Professor Bert O. States's *The Shape of Paradox* is less evident. The book is another theological and philosophical "essay" on *Waiting for Godot*. In each of six brief chapters States develops a single thesis and illustrates it with a primary example from the text. His hundred pages are notably overstuffed with references to the intellectual furniture of Western civilisation. His index looks like a precocious but predictable graduate school reading list—Kirkegaard, Auerbach, Kermode, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Augustine, Robbe-Grillet, Schopenhauer, Lukács, Jon Kott, Bert States, etc. etc. But behind this veil of authority and profundity, the perfectly obvious is constantly charging.

This book is a classic example of the currently rampant method of scholarly presentation which set up an artificial context of heavy-duty intellectual references to camouflage the banality of the authors observations. Most of States's many references to world-renowned authors serve only ostensibly to place Beckett in a wider intellectual framework. The comparison in most cases is not really to Beckett's work but to States's argument. By adducing these analogous passages from other critics on other authors, States strives to give the impression that the quality of his thought is on a par with the distinguished thinkers he quotes. Unfortunately, it is not.

States devotes his first two chapters, entitled "The Language of Myth" and "Generic Time and Place," to establishing that the spareness of the language of *Godot* and the lack of unique references to time, place, and specific personal milieu for the characters give *Godot* a universal or "mythical" dimension. Because they are not limited by specific associations, the characters and situations readily take on extended associations. *Mons laborat!* But the creature astir here is not entirely harmless. States fails to see the difference between Beckett's statement that *Waiting for Godot* is a play which "strives at all costs to avoid definition" and his own irresponsible invitation to "liberty of inference or free association." He finds *Godot* "so docile, so amenable to adjustment: it will surround what food it is given, like an amoeba." In a flurry of metaphor, he compares the play to a Rorschach blot inviting a freedom of reader response which he calls a critical "Rapture of the Deep." Scuba divers know the deceptions and fatal dangers of that kind of rapture in reality. States should heed the Implications of his own metaphor.

In Chapter Three, “The God in the Plot,” States advances the proposition that Pozzo is to be compared to Godot and both seen as representations of the Divine. Professor States’s appreciation of his audience’s ability to apprehend what Beckett has made clear in the text of his play must be minimal indeed if he believes that he has to instruct them on this point. Pozzo’s lines; “...Pozzo! Made in God’s image.... Who is Godot? ...You took me for Godot.” are clear enough without States’s overblown deductions.

States’s argument in Chapter Four, “The Fool of Time,” is for once not so blatantly self-evident from the text itself. Because Pozzo begins in good fortune in Act I, exhibits pride, and ends in a state of suffering and misfortune in Act II; States argues that he is the archetype of the tragic hero. According to States, Pozzo’s hubris consists of delivering the speech on night in which he reduces time to the mechanical setting of the sun. This establishes Pozzo’s sin and punishment as “actual sin” committed in time and finding retribution in time. It is a personally earned destiny in contrast to the original sin of having been born which places Estragon and Vladimir in an “Imposed Situation”—the subject and title of Chapter Five.

The larger argument of the book as developed in the last two chapters contends that the subplot of Pozzo and Lucky presents in a linear, temporal development a more personally specific kind of tragic destiny within the universal human predicament represented by the main plot of Vladimir and Estragon. Together the two contrasting fates complement each other and offer a complete version of human destiny.

The relationship of the subplot to the main plot gives “Godot” the “shape” referred to in States’s title. He represents this structure by a diagram showing the “comic” action of Vladimir and Estragon as straight lines: one slanting upward in Act I and another slanting downward in Act II. The “tragic” action of Pozzo and Lucky is represented in each act by a circle tangent to those lines. That (STOP THE PRESSES!) is the structure of the play: the “comic” action of Didi and Gogo impinged upon briefly once in each act by tangential contact with the “tragic” action of Pozzo and Lucky. It is the shape of a “paradox” because, as with the two crucified thieves, salvation and damnation are meted out unaccountably by the same Divinity. For some, grace is given; for others, it is denied. Tragic roles and comic roles are assigned arbitrarily.

States’s argument that the Pozzo-Lucky sub-plot is a kind of “tragic relief” within a comic plot is moderately instructive. There can be no doubt that the passage of time brings suffering to Pozzo and Lucky in a way that it does not to Vladimir and Estragon. The contrast in their fates is worth considering in this light. Pozzo says pointedly in Act I in a line which Beckett makes much of in his own direction of *Godot*, “For surely I shall suffer.” But States’s insistence that the fates of the characters have different origins is based upon a fundamental misreading.

In the central speech of the play, Pozzo says that his blindness and Lucky’s dumbness came upon them “one day”—the day of their birth and of their death. States acknowledges the passage as the “crucial hinge” of the play but misreads it as Pozzo’s inability to remember correctly and to distinguish past, present, and future. The point, of course, of the collapse of all time into a single day and finally a single instant is not that Pozzo cannot distinguish the moments of his existence. He does have that problem, but that is not essential. The essential fact is that the condition which brings about his suffering is constant and ever present.

Time is not, after all, a whirligig which brings in its revenges for the misdeeds of the past. The afflictions of Pozzo and Lucky are not brought about by their own actions in time, as States asserts. Nor is the change in their condition merely the random result of the slow diminution of capacity with time. The fate of Pozzo and Lucky may be manifested more obviously overtime, but it is no more a consequence of actions in time than the fate of Vladimir and Estragon. Physical affliction, like unfulfilled wafting, is the consequence of an absolute universal condition present from the moment of birth until death. Time is only the undifferentiated medium in which destinies are enacted. “Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time,” Pozzo shouts, “When! ... One day, is that not enough for you...” By stressing “*one day*” Pozzo is emphasising the fact that the condition of time is *universal* rather than the fact that the date is unknown and therefore immaterial. A single causality reduces birth and death to one moment. And that moment is the same for all humanity—as Beckett indicates with one of his characteristic grammatical progressions: “... one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day *we*’ll go deaf [Pozzo and Lucky], one day we were born, one day we [everyone] shall die.... They give birth astride of a grave...” (Emphasis added).

Even for those coming to Beckett and *Godot* for the first time, States’s book will be of little use. It belabors what any intelligent reader would perceive on his own, misleadingly invites uncritical response, and misinterprets the “birth astride a grave” passage which presents the central philosophy and one of the central images of the play.

In contrast to States’s book, John Calder’s *A Samuel Beckett Reader* provides a useful and needed introduction. His selections are mostly the same as in his earlier reader but with the addition of works published after its appearance. The novels and short fiction are far more liberally represented than the plays—more for reasons of copyright than anything else one suspects. There are lengthy excerpts from all the major novels and also from the less well-known works like *More Pricks Than Kicks*, *Mercier and Camier*, and *First Love*. Although the collection contains less drama than fiction, the longer excerpts from the pre-1975 plays *Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* are augmented by the Introduction containing short passages of the plays since 1975 to give an adequate overview of Beckett the dramatist. And the complete text of *Come and Go* compensates in part for the absence of fuller examples of the minimalist mime and monologues of the recent plays.

Calder’s choice of selections illustrates Beckett’s types of writing and main themes—including his humor, feeling for animals, treatment of love, and Gothic fascination with ghosts—so characteristically that the question of editorial bias never arises. The selections are presented according to an intelligent and informed chronology of composition rather than by date of publication so that readers can really see the position of individual works in the pattern of Beckett’s development.

The section on Beckett’s poetry—unquestionably the most underestimated of his writings—will be of special interest to those who know him only as a novelist and playwright. Even from the few examples here, readers can get a sense that although he is not a prolific poet, Beckett is nevertheless a poet of the first quality.

In his introductory material Calder is as concerned as Professor States with establishing an intellectual and cultural context—not, however, as a means of giving importance to his own perceptions, but as a means of providing a framework in which Beckett's works can be recognized and appreciated more readily. Many of Calder's points are broad, personal generalisations open to challenge, but they effectively illuminate the works.

His comparison of Beckett's later plays and short prose to music goes beyond the by now familiar observation that the cadence, timing, and minute details of pattern require attention like that given to chamber music—an analogy which Beckett himself has used often. More importantly, Calder's comparison of Beckett to Schubert and Beethoven offers a corrective for the audience which finds in Beckett an unacceptably pessimistic world view and situations too stark and somber to look at. In response to those like critic John Simon who recently challenged Beckett's supporters to look him in the eye and say they enjoy performances of the newest plays, Calder writes: "Beckett is often criticised for the blackness of his vision, and the question is asked why he feels it so necessary to write to depress us. The same question is not asked of Beethoven's *For the Faraway Beloved* or of Schubert's *Winterreise*, two song cycles of overpowering sadness and perfect beauty, which audiences flock to hear sung by their most famous contemporary interpreters. If there is a huge sadness in Beckett's work, it is akin to the great Romantic music of the past in its evocation of beauty, in the way phrases haunt the mind, and in all the other qualities that he introduces, including humor, flashes of joy, moments of contemplative peace. "The point, though broad, is valid. Not only are the principles of construction in Beckett's work like those of music, but Beckett should be accorded the same right to portray the sadness of life in an aesthetically effective mode as his acknowledged influences, Beethoven and Schubert.

The comparison with Beethoven is developed at greater length. Calder sees in both artists a pattern of three periods of development. Like Beethoven, Beckett began with an early period of "non-emotional" extension of the current artistic possibilities. As a young man he was "a mannerist delighting in an eccentric use of language, portraying the world he observed but did not feel very much a part of, exploring the comic possibilities of human relationships and especially of love." To this period belong *Murphy*, *More Pricks than Kicks* and everything else he wrote before the war and *Waiting for Godot*.

And, like Beethoven, in a second period Beckett exhibits in his works a "new dynamic where emotion constantly breaks out of the framework of form, thereby increasing the possibilities of style and content. "This is the period of *Godot*, *Endgame*, the *Trilogy*, *How It Is*, *Krapp*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*. It is marked by great purity of style which allows Beckett to depict a world "recognizably the real world, but stylized to catch those moments in life that are most important or most revealing."

Finally, Beckett has a late period in which, like Beethoven, he "turns away from the world into himself—to find "an introspective peace" in which he could escape his own suffering and "make a statement about the human condition." "Extreme brevity and concentration, and a perceptible change in tone and atmosphere" distinguish the works of this period. They include among others the plays since 1975: *Footfalls*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Rockaby*, the television scripts: *Ghost Trio*, *But the Clouds*, and the new, short poetic prose works: *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Company*.

Much of Calder's introduction seeks to situate Beckett within the tradition of European Romanticism—a source of interest in Beckett's own reading which has directly influenced his writing from the beginning to the present. His first poetry, *Echo's Bones*, for example, begins with an image he has pointed out as drawn from Goethe's *Der Gaier (The Eagle)*. And the rehearsal notebook for *That Time* acknowledges the influence of Hölderlin's *Hyperion Fragment*. The entire text of *Nacht und Traume* is the poem of the minor German romantic poet Matthäus von Collin set to music by Schubert.

Calder finds Beckett's characters not far removed from Goethe's Werther and Wilhelm Meister—“creations who lived to suffer and to learn through suffering.” For him, Beckett is a late romantic who depicts with Goethe the need for love, the warmth of human friendship, the regret for lost opportunity, and the evocation of sadness for its own sake.”

Ultimately, Calder sees Beckett as a great “neo-mannerist” who by distortion, caricature, and ambiguity reflects and presages the great social and political ills and uncertainties of his time. While ever insisting on purely historical or political readings, Calder sees and constantly calls attention to Beckett's awareness of the apocalyptic moment. Beckett thus becomes for him the special, outstanding spokesman for humanity confronted with unprecedented horror and the imminence of its own demise. Beckett's importance, Calder points out, does not come from fictionalized documentary of war, concentration camps, or nuclear bombs. It comes from his haunting depiction of humanity faced with the great suffering of twentieth-century holocaust in a final moment of consciousness between the beginning of the individual or collective end and the extinction of sensibility.

Other traditions as a context for Beckett's work might have occurred to other readers and might have served as well; Beckett's background and interests in music, visual arts, and literature is vast. But Calder's choice of European Romanticism is at least as close to the direct concerns of Beckett himself as other contexts one might have chosen.

And the time is also right for a look at Beckett from this perspective. In the years since *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett has assumed a role much like that of Joyce in the second quarter of this century. No longer the exclusive property of an elite avant garde, he has become the established master, a major influence on other authors. He is an accepted and popular figure. Two different runs of evenings of new one-act plays have sold out in New York's theater district. And the theater in which they played has been named The Samuel Beckett Theater. He is the subject of set exams in Britain and busloads of students are brought to special matinees of *Godot* to prepare for them. But attraction does not confer understanding, and Beckett's ever larger and wilder audience is often confused by what it has so eagerly chosen to see or read. In his innovation Beckett is still beyond his time. What Richard Ellmann said of Joyce is true of Beckett, we are still learning to be his contemporaries. By locating Beckett's emotional equivalents in music, painting, and German Romanticism, Calder's introduction is a helpful step for both the new readers and theatre-goers first engaged in the struggle to be Beckett's contemporaries—to accept his work for what it is—and also for those who have been at that task for some time.

**Review:** Pierre Chabert ed., *Samuel Beckett*, numéro spécial hors-série de *Revue d'Esthétique* publiée avec le concours du Centre national de la Recherche scientifique et du Centre national des Lettres. Toulouse, Editions Privat, 1986. Pp. 480.

*Pierre Astier*

At first glance, this special issue of *Revue d'Esthétique*, entirely devoted to Beckett and coming out in April 1986—right on time for the author's eightieth birthday—might remind us of the *Cahier de l'Herne* n. 31, directed by T. Bishop and R. Federman and published in 1976 just after Beckett had turned seventy: both volumes have more or less the same format, the same aspect of a dossier complete with new excerpts from Beckett's unpublished works, critical essays or articles, interviews or conversations, personal letters, reminiscences or testimonials, nice and appropriate illustrations, bibliographical and chronological data. Yet, past these apparent similarities in their general outlook and make-up they remain, to a large extent, quite different from each other in their respective choices of/ and approaches to Beckett's works. In other words, *déjà vu* perhaps, but *déjà lu* certainly not.

To begin with, the number of texts in *L'Herne* dealing with Beckett's novels or other forms of narratives was almost the double of those concerning his plays; whereas nearly all entries in *Revue d'Esthétique* have to do either with his theater and other forms of audio-visual works or with the theatricality of his fiction and, especially, with non-dramatic pieces such as *Le Dépeuplaur* and *Compagnie* that have already been the object of various stage adaptations. Furthermore, most studies in *L'Herne* that dealt with Beckett's plays tended, through a mainly thematic approach, towards philosophical interpretations. Indeed, only two texts under the heading "Au travail avec Beckett"—one by A. Schneider, the other an interview of R. Blin by T. Bishop—were directly concerned with such a practical problem as the actual staging of Beckett's plays. Well, if this issue of *Revue d'Esthétique* may still be seen as a kind of offshoot of the *Cahier de l'Herne*, it can only be with regard to that specific approach, for it could bear as a general subtitle what was just a particular, and rather undernourished, caption in the latter: "At work with Beckett."

At the very start of his "Présentation," P. Chabert wants to make things perfectly clear: "Ce numéro *Samuel Beckett* est consacré au travail, à la pratique non au commentaire. /.../ On n'y parlera donc ni d'absurde, ni de transcendance, ni d'être là, etc. /.../ Le propos est plus simple, plus direct, plus près de la vie /.../: Beckett au travail, aux prises avec l'oeuvre, l'oeuvre à accomplir—avec ses différents collaborateurs, décorateurs, musiciens, cameramen, acteurs, metteurs en scène." (p.9) And, in accordance with his purpose, he did indeed call upon the participation of such collaborators as mentioned above: out of sixty-four contributors, at least thirty belong—like himself, of course—to *le monde du spectacle*. But although the others are more readily identified as critics and, generally, members of the academic community (or in some cases like S. E. Gontarski *et al*, with a foot in both worlds), they too favor and exemplify here the same practical approach to Beckett's works. Now, it is true that there are a few exceptions that seem to contradict Chabert's categorical assertion whereby no philosophical interpretations and, particularly, no mention of *absurde*, *transcendance*, or *être-là* are to be found in this volume: after all, T. Todorov in "L'espoir chez

Beckett” (where he contrasts the infamous cylinder in *Le Dépeupleur* with Plato’s famous cave) does speak of a “monde désespéré et absurde” (p. 29), of “l’illusion de l’absurde” (p. 32), and à propos of *Compagnie* of a world that “cesse d’être absurde.” (p.35); for his part, M. Esslin, in “une poésie d’images mouvantes,” speaks of Beckett’s “exploration de l’Être” (p.391), of “problème de l’Être” (p. 391), of “expérience existentielle” (392), and even brings in Schopenhauer.(393) However, the stress in these two particular essays is still much less on Beckett’s philosophical ideas per se than on the way he expresses them through what Chabert calls his “travail de composition et d’écriture.” (p. 14) Actually, in the long list of contributors there is only one lonely philosopher identified as such—Gilles Deleuze whose short entry on *Film* (pp. 381-382) is curtly, and somewhat unfairly, summarized thus: “According to Gilles Deleuze, *Film* derives from Berkeley and his principle ‘esse est percipi’.” (p. 471) which, to me, makes his contribution sound a lot like a fine example of *l’art d’enfoncer une porte ouverte...*

At any rate, this new Beckett dossier is divided into six main parts. Following a short but vibrant testimonial from H. Pinter, P. Chabert’s detailed and forceful “Présentation,” and a brief survey of Beckett’s literary evolution and artistic innovations by E. Fournier (who is also credited for translating into French most of the texts originally written in English), Part I is entitled “Roman, Théâtre/ Théâtre, Récit.” It comprises nine entries, all but two of which (Todorov’s essay and E. Klausner’s interview of L. Janvier and A. Vaquin—Janvier about their translation of *Watt*) are devoted—by D. Anzieu, L. Janvier, A. Ubersfeld, A. Simon, M. Saison, M. N. Delorme and L. Breuer—to the question of interrelationship between Beckett’s plays and narratives. Part II—“Dramaturgie”—is headed by D. McMillan’s informative and perceptive article on *Eleuthéria* as being Beckett’s comical version of the Cartesian *Discours de la Méthode*, that is to say as a *mise-en-doute* through *mise-en-oeuvre* of several past or present theatrical traditions and conventions, and, therefore, as a play that clears the way for *Godot* where Beckett will discover his own “méthode de l’art dramatique.” (p. 109) Then comes one of the most valuable documents in this *dossier*: a series of long and so far unpublished excerpts from *Eleuthéria* itself, whole scenes from Acts I, II and III, plus Beckett’s “note sur la disposition de la scène et l’action marginale.” (pp. 112-113) The next entry is a substantial essay by E. Jacquart on the genesis of *Fin de Partie*, on the changes from the first typescript to the last version that show how Beckett is always at work trying to find, paradoxically, a “forme-Dieu caché de l’oeuvre—qui accommode l’informe.” (p. 145) Finally—after A. Didier-Weill’s mercifully short note on time, death and waiting, in *Godot*—S. E. Gontarski demonstrates once again, through a close examination of the successive versions of *Pas* (and not of *Comédie*, as stated in the “résumés”), Beckett’s creative process as a “combat contre l’explicite” and the search for a “schema formel.” (p. 155)

With thirty-seven entries altogether, Parts III, “Représentations,” IV, “Musiques,” V, “Samuel Beckett, metteur en scène,” VI, “L’image (T.V., film),” constitute the major corpus of this volume, but since I could not possibly review them in detail I shall only indicate here that—to the editor’s content and, I assume, the reader’s—they *all* tackle essentially the problems, always practical and often technical, of directing, staging, adapting and acting, whether the contributors are primarily theater/television professionals or academics/critics.<sup>1</sup>

Although the entries that follow M. Esslin’s essay are listed in the “Sommaire” (p. 5) as components of Part VI, they really belong to a separate Appendix filled with compilations of updated bio-bibliographical facts and a whole series of diverse chronologies all specifically relating

to the staging of Beckett's dramatic or non-dramatic works throughout the U. S. A. and Europe (France, England, Italy, Spain, West Germany), thus providing very useful informations to Beckett scholars in need of quick and reliable references.

Reflecting, in various degrees, the four main orientations in Beckett most recent criticism which E. Jacquart sums up in an introduction to his bibliography (pp.424-425)—“Le travail théâtral et audio-visuel,” “La problématique de la traduction de soi,” “L'étude des manuscrits,” “Les ‘dramaticules’ récents,”—this special issue of *Revue d'Esthétique* adds a new dimension to the area of Beckett studies or, at least, extends it significantly. Also, and notwithstanding a few mixups here and there (like for instance, besides the ones I already mentioned, a certain discrepancy between the order of the “résumés” and “l'ordre du sommaire” with which they are supposed to agree), this impressive and elegant volume has been, in general, quite carefully edited, so that my only—but serious—reservation is more of a material nature, for it concerns its extremely poor binding quality. After opening flat and leafing through my own copy just a couple of times, most of its pages came off loose at the seam, which makes its use, as a research tool, very *impractical* indeed. *Domage!*

#### NOTE

1. Faced, in both cases, with *embarras du choix*, I chose to refrain from the temptation of naming “just a few.”

**Review:** Kristin Morrison. *Canter and Chronicles: The Use of Narrative in the Plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Pp. viii + 228. \$20.

*Keith Cushman*

The characters of Beckett and Pinter are compulsive storytellers. As Kristin Morrison sees it, their narratives are “nothing less than a modern psychological equivalent of the soliloquy constituting an intrinsic part of the central dramatic action itself.” The characters tell stories “to reveal deep and difficult thoughts and feelings while at the same time concealing them as fiction or at least distancing them as narration.” For the great talkers of Beckett and Pinter, “telling becomes a form of doing,” and “storytelling... is itself the action.” Frequently the characters tell their stories to escape from the pain of their existence; “evasion itself is often the main action.”

Morrison canters play by play through the canons of Beckett and Pinter. She is a good practical critic, sensitive to the delicate psychological nuances of her two playwrights. The analysis of *Krapp* and his tapes and of *Winnie* and her memories is impressive. She is just as persuasive discussing the complex monologues of Pinter’s *Landscape* and *Old Times*. Indeed *Canter and Chronicles* always has interesting things to say about Beckett and Pinter. Morrison writes with clarity and relish about even the most obscure, miniature plays of the two authors. Her yoking of Beckett and Pinter also yields at least one interesting side-effect, for a disturbed sense of human sexuality seems to be at the center of most of the works she discusses.

Still, I must confess that though I began *Canter and Chronicles* with the belief that narrative is very important in the plays of Beckett and Pinter, I was rather less convinced when I had finished the book. The fact is that Morrison simply does not “refer only to actual narrations ... delivered during the course of the play by one of the characters.” Her interpretations regularly veer away from her avowed topic in the direction of more general criticism. “There are frequent references, especially in Beckett’s later plays, to a face,” but so what? While it is no doubt “useful to note two important related elements” in *No Man’s Land*—the suggestion of homosexuality, the hostility toward women—such elements have precious little to do with Morrison’s consideration of narrative. Similarly her account of *A Slight Ache* focuses on the “anxiety of death” in the play rather than on Edward’s “attempt to retell his life story.” Too often she seems merely to be offering generalized literary analysis. It’s as if her intended subject, storytelling, doesn’t give her enough to hang her critical hat on.

Furthermore, the argument suffers from a disconcerting looseness in its definition of narrative. No matter how accurate are the Biblical and literary allusions Morrison identifies in *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*, it is farfetched to describe these allusions as versions of narrative. She also discusses Pinter’s long set-piece speeches as narratives whether or not they contain a story. An argument about storytelling that can accommodate Ban’s instructions to Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* or Mick’s aggressive ideas of interior decorating in *The Caretaker* seems to me fatally blurred. Mick does indeed dazzle “Davies with language,” but it isn’t always the language of narrative.

Even when Morrison is genuinely focusing on her narrative target, she keeps reaching the same conclusion over and over. E.g., “personal anecdotes” in the later Beckett “both reveal and conceal, shielding the character while at the same time showing where he is most vulnerable.” *A Piece of Monologue*, written as a prose piece rather than a play, raises interesting questions about a writer in whose work the distinctions between monologue and fiction tend to capsize (and so do most of Beckett’s fictions from *Molloy* onwards). These are questions that Morrison never begins to address. The scant single paragraph of conclusion at the end of the book is all too symptomatic. The practical criticism is very good; the theoretical underpinnings are negligible.

There is much to be said in praise of a book that offers many instructive insights into the difficult plays of Beckett and Pinter. Any serious student of the two playwrights will profit from Morrison’s interpretations. Still, in a comment on Pinter’s *Silence*, she does inadvertently write her own epigraph: “plenty of stuff to occupy the analytic mind, but none of it quite coheres.”

**Review:** S. E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, 221 pp.

*Martin Esslin*

This, as Gontarski himself calls it in his introduction, is a “biography of texts,” the texts of some of Beckett’s principal dramatic works, based on a careful study of the different stages of composition that can be documented in the various drafts and typescripts that have, in the course of time, found their way into libraries and archives.

The manuscripts that are here carefully examined, dated, put into chronological sequence and analysed include: *Fin de Partie*, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, *Play*, *Film*, *Eh Joe*, *Ghost Trio*, “...but the clouds...”, *Not I*, *That Time*, *Footfalls*, *A Piece of Monologue*, *Rockaby*, *Ohio* *Impromptu*, *Quadra I + II* and *Catastrophe*. In addition Gontarski gives a detailed account of a hitherto unpublished sketch for a story or play *Kilcool* that contains some of the germs of *Not I*; and prints, as an appendix facsimiles of the manuscripts of two unfinished mime-plays, *Mime du Reveur A* (which anticipates elements of *Endgame*) and *J. Mime*, (written for Jack McGowran and pointing towards *Quadra I & II*). Gontarski has performed an admirable piece of textual scholarship. He has dated the different drafts, typescripts as well as holographs, and established their chronology so that the history, the development of these texts can be reliably—and illuminatingly—reconstructed.

What emerges from this tracing of the genesis of some of the finest works of the literature of our time is, precisely, what Gontarski calls Beckett’s “intent of undoing”—undoing, that is, the elements in his work which are grounded in, and reflect his own personal life-experience or other elements derived from “reality”—people Beckett encountered or places he knows.

It is thus, undoubted, fascinating to realise that, for example, the world “after the flood” that we encounter in *Endgame* directly springs from Beckett’s experience in 1945 as an ambulance driver in the St. Lo military hospital, surrounded as it was by ruins, desolation and churned up earth; again and again Gontarski shows how Beckett after having started from such “realistic,” even “descriptive” beginnings, gradually but systematically erases the traces of descriptive or personal detail in order to arrive at, in the end, distillations of reality, structures, which, having been purged of much that is purely individual and accidental, can become genuine images of the “condition humaine.” These refined and distilled images still contain concrete detail—the objects Winnie cherishes in *Happy Days*, the social set-up that still shines through the fragmented scraps of recollection in *Play*, the memories the listener rehearses in *That Time*, but having been dislocated into mere broken fragments of narrative, they become themselves generalised metaphors of the objects and incidents that—absurdly—constitute our existence.

Another aspect of Beckett’s method of composition which Gontarski’s research highlights is the extent to which, increasingly throughout his career, Beckett has become preoccupied with structuring his material according to rigorously formal, even mathematical, principles of permutation and variation. While much of Beckett’s earlier work notably the “trilogy,” could be seen as a stream of consciousness, a torrential inner monologue, which, carefully shaped as it was,

nevertheless suggested the chaotic outpourings of an inner voice, his writing has become increasingly rigorously structured and geometrical, culminating in highly formalised structures like *Lessness* and *Quadrat I & II*.

All these insights are masterfully presented and documented in Gontarski's book.

Yet the very success, the very illumination his work provides, seems to me to raise some highly interesting and intriguing theoretical questions: how does this type of research, this type of insight into the genesis of individual works of art, into an authors general development as a craftsman, square with the contemporary tendency to discount the importance of the author as creator of a text, to proclaim the autonomy of the text as a "given," existing in its own right, and, once available as a written artifact, referential neither to its creator nor to any reality outside itself?

If the text exists in its own right, as an artifact to be judged solely as what it is, not how it became what it is, if, indeed, it is argued that, after all, we do not know the genesis of the texts of Sophocles or Euripides, or, less convincingly, Shakespeare, and therefore should be able to read these without reference to the biography or working methods of their authors, then knowledge of how a text grew out of first drafts, revisions and corrections should be irrelevant, or even positively misleading; after all: the reader who reads the completed text, the playgoer who confronts it, does not have the privilege, or, indeed, the time, to take the subtleties of the composition of that text into consideration while experiencing the impact of the finished product.

And, indeed, it might be argued, Beckett's persistent refusal to discuss his own intentions, or to comment on the meaning of his text, on the grounds that the text as it stands must say all it says, otherwise it would be a deficient text, being in need of supplementary elucidation. ("if I knew who Godot was, I should have had to put into the play") seems to point towards the post-structuralist view. Indeed, if he has gone to such lengths to erase the process of the genesis of the germ of his texts as well as the actual method of their composition, is it fair to reveal it all to the gaze of the curious?

This, it seems to me, crystallizes in an extremely clear, manner, some of the dialectics of the present theoretical debate. Both standpoints, I feel, have something to be said for them nor do they necessarily seem mutually exclusive.

The dogmatic assertion that a text should be judged independently of its author or of its historical referentiality is, on closer inspection, overstated and *eo ipso* less than wholly realistic. Even Barthes and Derrida have their names on the title-pages of their writings, and these writings themselves are peppered with references to authors like Racine, Balzac, Freud, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Artaud and innumerable others.

And even texts of whose authors we know little or nothing have, and need to be perceived as having, historical referentiality. We should not possess the texts of the *Iliad*, the Greek tragedians, the medieval mystery plays, without historical—and hence referential—research which has established these texts themselves. We should not be able to read, say, the Greek classics, without a knowledge of the meaning of the words they used—knowledge that has been gained by historical and archaeological research. We should not have the texts of Shakespeare (which are now

proclaimed not to need any referentiality to any real world) if their “biography” and printing history, their sources and historical, social and cultural context had not been established by scholars just as meticulous as Gontarski, if less fortunate than he who had access to Beckett’s early drafts as well as to their author himself.

Nevertheless the champions of the autonomy of the text, as text now existing in its present form, have a very strong case, particularly if, as Gontarski so convincingly shows, the author has gone to immense lengths to erase the traces of its genesis. It is irrelevant to the meaning and impact of a piece of writing whether the author laboured over it for years or threw it onto the page in an instant, “never blotting a line.” And this is especially true of texts like Beckett’s who deliberately opens up his work to a multitude of widely diverging interpretations, precisely in order to force the reader or spectator to experience the uncertainty and ambivalence of the images. Beckett himself has built the need for deconstruction into his own texts: let each individual reader or spectator make of them what he wants!, let the ultimate “meaning” of them be found in the tensions and gaps between the possible contradictory interpretations to which they open themselves up! What then do we gain by knowing how they originated? Might it not be a positive loss if our knowledge of their genesis narrowed the range of possible interpretations? This, I feel, is undoubtedly so. And yet the need to inquire, the “obligation to express” the findings of research into these texts, remains, simply as an aspect of the irresistible urge to find out, to increase our knowledge, to yield to the basic human instinct which is the source of civilisation itself: simple curiosity.

The contradiction is there. Yet, it seems to me, it resolves itself if we manage to look at the two opposing viewpoints as no more than two totally different fields of inquiry.

The one is *criticism*—the activity to respond to a work of art and the endeavour to express this response and make it the basis of new thought, new vision, new insight. The other is *history* or the *psychology* of the creative process, or a multitude of other fascinating and rewarding scholarly pursuits. While a detailed knowledge of how Michelangelo acquired his paints, what he paid for them and by what technique he applied them to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel has no relevance whatever to our response to the images we see there, that information is valuable in itself and well worth unearthing. Equally, there will be some value in knowing what kind of person Michelangelo was and how he lived. We would be less than human if we did not want to satisfy our curiosity about those matters.

Yet it is essential that we should be aware of the fact that the two different spheres—the contemplation of the work of art as it is, on the one hand, and the research into its genesis on the other—should not be confounded or merged. For it is here that the “biographical” or “intentional” fallacy of literary criticism tends to originate. Let us beware of the temptation to use biographical knowledge as a substitute for the genuine impact of the work of art upon us. I dread the moment—almost inevitable now that Gontarski has revealed the origins of the play—when the set of a performance of *Endgame* will include a photographic representation of St. Lo after the Normandy landings, (and we have, alas, already had the subway station afterworld War III which is almost as bad) just as I have suffered more than once from the tree in *Waiting for Godot* looking like a painting of the crucifixion.

There is another danger that lurks in the exploration of the process of creation of a poet like Beckett: namely that the *ex post factum* reconstruction of how it was done should be mistaken for a prescription for “how to do it.” Ever since the schools of rhetoric of antiquity there has always been a perilous implication in literary criticism to turn an inquiry into the structure and creation process of works of art into a prescriptive methodology for *producing* new works of art. Much dead and mechanical art has been engendered by the consequences of this fallacy which is at the basis of all “academicism” and, even worse, much harm has been done by the imposition of rules of “how to do it” which, throughout the centuries, have restricted and stifled genuinely original creativity.

If Samuel Beckett creates his works in a particular way and if we can follow his creative process, that is fascinating knowledge which opens up exhilarating insights into his psychology and the psychology of the creative process itself. But that does not mean that any other artist does, or should, follow similar ways of creativity.

It is one of the merits of Gontarski’s outstandingly researched and brilliantly argued book that, beyond its engrossing detective work, it opens up and helps to clarify these general aspects of the theoretical debate.

**Review:** Carlton Lake. *No Symbols Where None Intended. A Catalogue of Books, Manuscripts and Other Materials Relating to Samuel Beckett in the Collections of the Humanities Research Center.* The University of Texas at Austin; Humanities Research Center, 1984. 188 pp. including index. \$20.

**Breon Mitchell**

This handsome and detailed catalogue of the extensive holdings of the Humanities Research Center in Austin offers an invaluable source of bibliographical information on Beckett's works. The exhibition which it accompanied was one of the highlights of an important international conference "Translating Beckett / Beckett Translating" held at the University of Texas in 1984. Over 430 items were on display, many of them unique, including the original manuscripts of most of Beckett's major novels and plays, together with several rare illustrated editions seldom seen by the public. Although most Beckett scholars are well aware of the rich holdings in Austin, it was breathtaking to see firsthand the range and depth of material exhibited.

The catalogue is a record of the exhibition; it was not intended as a definitive bibliography, nor even as a full listing of the complete holdings of Beckett's works in the HRC—there would not have been enough display cases for everything they have. Nevertheless, no important manuscript or first edition in the HRC collection was missing from the show. In selecting and describing the holdings, Carlton Lake chose to "let the books and manuscripts tell their own story, only sketching in background, where it seemed useful, in order to help them do so." The result is an unusually coherent bibliographical overview of the development and progression of Beckett's work through 1983.

Lake's seemingly modest role is in fact a difficult and crucial one—to summarize and interweave the often complex lives of the texts and the author. Lake's touch is light, and with exception of one or two unnecessary swipes at the national character of the French, he manages to entertain and enlighten the reader without undue over-simplification. Read carefully, the catalogue offers a wealth of detail which often corrects or enlarges upon our knowledge of the history of the texts. The descriptions are particularly good at identifying and specifying the relationship of variants, "false starts," and other varieties of pre-publication excerpts to later complete printings of individual works, as well as at identifying the contents and various stages of manuscript drafts. Linda Eichhorn seems to have been instrumental in this latter task, "a considerable achievement," as Lake points out, "blended of persistence and percipience, which has helped to remove several hand-me-down misconceptions." Those using Richard Admussen's admirable *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: A Study*, will want to double check the additions and revisions provided in the Austin catalogue.

Lake and his assistants, Eichhorn and Sally Leach, were not restricted to the evidence of books and manuscripts. They also had at their disposal a wealth of personal correspondence to, from, and about Beckett, from which Lake has chosen to quote quite liberally. This material is often particularly revealing. Although it is clear that Lake did not wish to weigh the catalogue down with footnotes and citations, it would have been extremely helpful if some concise system of indicating when such material is being quoted for the first time had been employed. Other minor cavils with

regard to documentation may be raised as well. The information provided for each entry is not always consistent. The color of bindings is sometimes indicated and sometimes omitted; the presence or lack of a dust-jacket is not always indicated. Inevitably, a few dates and statements regarding priority of printings are inaccurate. The text provisionally titled "The Way" (no. 433), listed as unpublished, had appeared in *College Literature* over a year before the catalogue came out. The reproductions of sample manuscript and typescript pages are clearly not intended for scholarly use, reduced as they often are to a point just below that at which they might have been deciphered. Although the numerous illustrations are a welcome visual record of the exhibition, their function is limited for the most part to the iconic.

Such objections are minor when placed beside the considerable achievement of *No Symbols Where None Intended*. That the quality of its layout, typography and paper offers such pleasure is an added bonus. It is clearly the most important bibliographical tool to appear since Admussen's study of the manuscripts, and as such will prove an indispensable aid to any Beckett scholar.

**Review:** *Samuel Beckett*, by Charles R. Lyons, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1983.

*Marek K&eacute; dzierski*

Charles R. Lyons's book was written as a general introduction to Beckett's plays for the Macmillan Modern Dramatists series, intended for "people interested in modern theater who prefer concise, intelligent studies of drama and dramatists, without jargon and an excess of footnotes." What looms large in many volumes of this type—a biography of a writer and the socio-theatrical context of his plays—attracts little attention here, the essentials of Beckett's life and work are condensed within a few opening pages, and parts of the chapter on *Waiting For Godot* situate Beckett's achievement in the context of the Parisian avant-garde of the fifties. The rest of the book is devoted to the elucidation of Beckett's plays.

Factographical details are restricted to a minimum, and here Mr. Lyons refers the reader to the bulk of Beckett criticism, from which he himself has drawn extensively. The length of the bibliography will certainly not frighten a novice in the field, although the inclusion of a bibliographical study and a book-length monograph of Beckett's late work (e.g. Knowlson's and Pilling's *Frescoes of the Skull*) would have been useful.

Lyons's aim is to "concentrate upon the text of each of Beckett's major plays as it operates in performance" (p. 13). Meant to be general, this study highlights only certain narrowly-restricted problems. The mode of discourse is subordinated to the main task: to set for the reader a perspective which will help him understand Beckett as a playwright, not as a thinker. Therefore only the most vital aspects for the argument are illuminated, while the argument itself focuses on form, technique, poetics, and evolution.

Lyons situates Beckett's drama within the tradition of the history of poetics (rather than the history of ideas), using examples from ancient drama, Shakespeare, Racine, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov and modern dramatists, to illustrate his argument. He conceives of Beckett's work in terms of evolution, as it develops in the process of "refining and distilling," or in the "simplification and intensification" of theatrical images. The conviction that this evolution reflects Beckett's understanding of the physical resources of the theatre and the assumption of the organic integrity of Beckett's plays form the foundation of Lyons's reasoning. The author seems to be telling us that if we want to understand Beckett's theater, we should analyse the implied poetics of his works, and especially the way their internal structure contributes to generating a network of meanings. He is interested in the subtle and complex interaction of a variety of potentially significant elements in the plays as they are to be perceived and explained by a hypothetical viewer. This is, we might infer, the ultimate source of involvement of the audience, quite the opposite of the *Mitspiel* strategies based on direct participation of the audience in the evolving action. Narrow as his perspective is, it is used in his argument with regard to three universal categories (Lyons call them "theatrical images") of time, space (scene) and character, which also appear as subtitles in each chapter.

In order to show us the principles according to which works operate, Lyons frequently embarks on what might be called a description of a space for interpretation. This space is indicated by a series of indeterminacies established by the text and affecting the spectator's imagination in such a way as to provoke "a particular kind of speculation." To show a repository of such possibilities, Lyons patiently enumerates the possibilities certain issues evoke (e.g., the five possibilities of explaining the rapport between Hamm's story and the situation on stage or the seven levels of Hamm's possible characterizations) and collects a variety of suggestions which particular passages bring forth. But he concludes with a statement that "actions and words hold a range of possible significance, but any significance remains potential," and since "the text itself provides no final clarification [...] any fixed resolution violates the play" (pp.61, 72). Thus the author says of *Waiting For Godot*: "The value of the image derives from its use by Vladimir and Estragon as an hypothesis on which they base their behavior. Beckett establishes a critical absence, not on the stage physically but within the cognitive processes of the two principal characters" (p. 48). And of *Endgame*: "...the play is the theatrical embodiment of the uncertainty and equivocation implicit in the concept of selfhood and the relationship of the self to the presence of another." (p.61)

Although such remarks may be considered "thematic," (one might argue that they refer us to specific problems of a particular branch of psychology), they are general enough that they do not seem to reduce the appeal of the play or to unduly narrow the range of experience of the spectator. In fact, Lyons explicitly identifies the principal subject of Beckett's fiction and drama as: "the consciousness of an aging person grappling with his clouded perception of the space he inhabits, attempting to reconcile images of the past that revolve in his imagination, questioning his own identity and the authenticity of his own existence" (p.7). This definition does need qualification—for it does not apply to most works written between *Whoroscope* and *Endgame*—but it confirms our impression that Lyons tends to look at Beckett from the point of view of the later works.

"The limits of consciousness form the boundaries of Beckett's sense of reality" (p.13). This remark too is more readily applicable to the late works with their tendency towards "the absence of an image of character" (p.158) than to plays like *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* where characters act on stage as distinct persons. Lyons acknowledges this and in the course of his book describes the changing poetical mechanisms employed to subvert naturalistic convention (or realistic, as Lyons prefers to call it). In the earlier plays this convention is broken by repetition, a poetic device used extensively by Beckett, thanks to which the immediate event is deprived of its insignificance by the denial of its uniqueness. Lyons distinguishes here between enacting and performing; the Beckettian characters, instead of enacting a story, are engaged in performing a repetition. They rely on repetition in that it promises to uphold their sense of identity. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, a "physical or scenic division between character and memory" takes the form of confrontation of the person on stage and the disembodied text. With *Words and Music* and *Cascando* this pattern changes when "individual consciousness becomes the arena for action." The essential structure of Beckett's late drama is binary. The text (or rather, verbal structure, for it may also be memory or recollected images) is set against the character (their relation being equivocal), who "revolves it in consciousness." The text becomes dominant, and indeed may even fully eclipse the character, as in *Not I*.

The categories of time, space (scene) and character not only serve Lyons's discussion of the polymorphous structure of Beckett's plays, but also provide co-ordinates in the authors attempt to

find a formula for continuity and integrity in Beckett's entire dramatic *oeuvre*, and, at the same time, to show a possible source of the uniqueness of his later works. Seen within these coordinates, the Beckettian evolution is the process of acquiring freedom from "a specific (scenic) location" and shifting to "non-space or functional space". In the end, a major change ensues: "the character becomes scenic, a location to house the repetition and place of narration." (p. 165).

How can a character become a location to house the repetition and place of narration? some common readers may ask. Those hoping for a general introduction to and a "concrete reading" of Beckett's work (i.e. the establishment of what recent theory calls all-fixed transcendental signification) may find these somewhat more abstract explanations as to how the system operates (not what the text says, but how it works) too dry and speculative. After all, they have the right to be moved by the poetry of what the text says rather than by how it is believed to move them. Professor Lyons may reply that he has been interested in nothing more—and nothing less—than how it *is* in Beckett's theater.

We may feel that the solutions to specific problems invite, and indeed demand, more discussion, although certain issues may seem clouded only because the limited size and the specific character of the book does not allow for more extensive clarification. But in this concise study the author has succeeded in showing us once more the value of the custodian of method over the purveyor of doctrine. Lyons has placed Beckett's *oeuvre* in a perspective that does not deny us the chance of explaining the entirely new notion of theatricality proposed by Beckett in his late drama.

**Review:** *Beckett's Theater: Interpretations for Performance*, by Sidney Homan, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press London and Toronto: Associated University Presses 1984.

*Marek K&eacute; dzierski*

By rights, we should welcome this book, given all factors that promise both competence and accessibility. Written by a university professor but clearly not someone dedicated to the impassionate dissecting of texts, it is the fruit of personal involvement and research supported by the experience of teaching and staging Beckett's works. Written by a Shakespeare scholar at a time when an extensive monograph on Shakespeare's lasting inspiration for Beckett has yet to be undertaken, it focuses on the self-reflective nature of Beckett's "theaters" (his plays for the stage and the media), something vitally important to Beckett criticism as it enters its fifth decade.

Both in his studies of Shakespeare and of Beckett, Sidney Homan advocates the metadramatic approach. It is tantamount, as he claims, to focusing on "theater's own workings," with emphasis on what he labels the aesthetics of metadramatic metaphor, something born out in the immediate theatrical experience. The author thus describes the scope of his inquiry: "...the imagery I will be looking at most closely is that based on anything within the gamut of our theatrical experience: the playwright, his craft, the physical theater, the theater itself as a metaphor, actors, the concept of dialogue, metaphor or simile, the audience, and most important, the energies generated among that trinity of playwright, actor, and audience in sustaining a meaningful illusion on stage" (p. 17).

As to the "meaningful illusion on stage," Mr. Homan makes a well-founded observation in his last book on Shakespeare, noting that in Beckett's work the "artificial world challenges and external reality that the playwright discredits in a way that Shakespeare never does nor could do. [...] The interplay within the dualistic notion of the world as a stage and the stage as a world that informs Shakespeare was simply not there, since Beckett's 'macrocosm' is not the public world, or the nature that Shakespeare would have mirrored, but our own idiosyncratic internal world, (*Shakespeare's Theater of Presence*, Bucknell University Press, 1986, p. 14).

The study postulated by Homan should be useful in every respect, for it is precisely the complex, paradoxical nature of Beckett's "artificiality" on stage that has given to his texts the "power to claw," and that lies perhaps at the very core of Beckett's originality. I am not convinced, however, that his book, in the shape in which it has been presented here, has succeeded in achieving what seems to be its goals: to give a cohesive interpretation of Beckett's dramatic work in "a more practical performance criticism," or "to put down in logical order the components [...] of Beckett's aesthetics" (p. 11).

It is not surprising that this all-inclusive approach is a "loose" system, "drawing on metaphors generated by a variety of elements in the theater (p.20). However, we are surprised that in confronting this rich variety, the author is so unceremonial in his use of principal terms. One looks in vain for definitions, even approximate ones, and for the delineation of related terms, which at times not only overlap but are interchangeable. Impromptu characterizations are affixed with offhand qualifiers and used in ad hoc oppositions. Homan's ever-present rhetorical device is to

place two of more terms next to each other without specifying the nature of the semantic relation between them.

The most widely used—in fact abused—distinction is that of thematics and aesthetics. As early as the preface we are given a taste of this art of substitution. The closest Sidney Homan comes to defining the two is when he speaks of the lack of separation between “what is said (thematics) and how it is being said (aesthetics)” (p.19). One wonders what distinguishes it from the traditional distinction between content and form. A little further on we hear about separating “form from content, or metadramatics from thematics” and the familiar quotation from Beckett’s essay on Joyce appears. Later on, aesthetics is juxtaposed with thematics, thematics, “or content,” with “metadramatics,” content with form, then form with substance, and content with style. Both principal terms appear as convenient modifiers: attributive, as in a statement on the art of radio: “in this medium, when one does not speak, one goes from thematic loneliness to aesthetic nonexistence” (p.123); or adverbial, as in a statement about *All That Fall*: “Aesthetically, the play is not about falling, but rising, about the yeastlike optimism of a birthday” (p.127). On occasion, the two terms are given a companion, as when Mr. Homan enumerates three levels of tension in *All That Fall*: “the prosaic one of whether Mrs. Rooney will see her husband; the thematic one of whether Mr. Rooney murdered the child; and the third and greater mystery, one of form rather than substance” (p.126). So there may be mystery of form, rather than substance in Beckett’s works, but as far as obscurity goes, “If there is obscurity in Beckett, it is thematic, I think, not aesthetic” (p.10).

If one agrees with Mr. Homan that his method is “loose,” one is inclined to doubt that his interpretation is “light” (p.20). Even if it is indeed a reading of Beckett’s plays “on the very terms by which they operate,” we can hardly grasp it as such. To paraphrase Homan’s own words, his book seems to be “a tremendous outpouring of formed and half-formed statements,” and this quality makes reading the 250-page volume an arduous endeavor. Often, in this state of weightlessness, we have the feeling that we have approached an understanding of the authors’ intention, yet we regret the lack of a more solid frame of reference. If there is anything valuable, beyond piecemeal observations, it can be perceived only with much effort or by chance.

Does the “inner” discourse then, despite the book’s style, reveal “the very terms by which Beckett’s works operate”? The common conclusion of Homan’s interpretive strands is a vague statement about energies generated among that trinity of author, actor, and audience in sustaining a meaningful illusion on stage. “Given this theater turning to itself, it is inevitable that the three ingredients for any production—artist, actor, and audience—should be prominent in Beckett’s works” (p.202), says Homan; “given” and “should be” are the key words here. The commentary (often showing a lack of sensitivity to Beckett’s irony) usually leads to stretched points and forced analogies, invited by the ubiquitous presumption of the union of “the trinity.” Here is one example taken from the chapter on *Krapp’s Last Tape*: “As he interacts with one certain and affirmative element of his life, the interaction is aesthetically affirmative even if the event itself, an abandonment of love, a separation, is thematically negative. The medium of the theater here relies not on the story itself but on the audience’s interaction—Krapp’s and ours—with that story. The play is about the union of audience (Krapp, us) and actor (Krapp, Krapp on tape, the tape recorder that bears his voice), and about a thematic union as well, of man and woman, of a man in the present with a man in his past, of the cerebral or imaginative with the physical and time-leaden. [...]

By definition the theater demands union, of actors and audience; a play can exist only if it is heard and seen” (p.102-103).

Why is the interaction aesthetically affirmative and thematically negative? Why is the play about the union of man and woman, present and past, rather than about the abyss, the unredeemable gap between them? Are “cerebral” and “imaginative” in opposition to each other, or merely in “apposition,” in this sentence? And what is “the story itself”? The recorded text, the text spoken by Krapp on stage, or the “plot” of the play? Certain conclusions seem to be at odds with interpretative common sense, dictated by experience in reading Beckett’s texts. Why should we link sexual creativity to artistic creativity if on numerous occasions Beckett has made a clear distinction between them? The only reason to do so would be the critic’s search for something to fit into his own scheme. If theatre—by definition—demands union, everything can be put under the comforting sign of the trinity, every disparate aspect can be domesticated.

Much of what is said in Homan’s book is not susceptible to proof. One of his interpretive “threads” deals with sexuality. The elucidation of Mrs. Rooney’s remark about the rim of Mr. Tyler’s wheel—the outside of the vagina that Tyler is too old to penetrate” (p. 118)--may be overstated, although as someone whose native tongue is not English, I yield to Mr. Homan’s feeling for word play. However, I would not subscribe to the view that in *Embers*, “the music master’s method of instruction [...] hints at crude sexual intercourse” (p.129), or that the character evoked in the B-voice of *That Time* is masturbating” trying like the man in *Eh Joe* to come sexually, but unable to do so, the spent penis displaced by the hollow tree” (p. 167). Can it be proven that in *Eh Joe* “the actor is masturbating off-camera since only his face is shown” (p. 152)? Regretfully, this passage is rather vague: “More than one actor and spectator has suggested that Joe is masturbating.” At any rate, the statement, “Like the semen, the story comes within Joe only to make its way out” seems to be in keeping with this sexual misreading of Beckett.

While such readings cannot be definitively refuted, there is no evidence for many of Homan’s observations, and some are clearly mistaken. We cannot prove that the ball in *All That Fall* is not Krapp’s black ball, yet I insist that there is no mention of color in the radio play. We cannot prove that “Eff” in *Embers* does not stand for “fuck,” nor that Minnie might not be Winnie’s daughter, but there is undoubtedly no mention of an emmet in *Endgame*. While we have no proof that Bianca is not a whore, not that it was not the case that “Krapp’s book *Effi* has failed, with only a few copies sold,” I insist that neither the sentence: “The engraver in *Endgame* sees nothing in his art, and Beckett has argued that the playwright’s impossible task is to write about nothing—as if it were something” (p.1 99), nor the footnote referring to the *Three Dialogues....* is accurate. It is striking that in this book of “performance criticism,” the author prefers lengthy discussion on subjects clearly belonging to what he labels thematics, to an analysis of stage implications in the dramatic works. For example, in his commentary on *A Piece of Monologue* (p.213-217), he analyses only the spoken text, not dwelling on its relation to stage action. References to Beckett’s own productions are rare, and Mr. Homan seldom takes into account solutions by Beckett’s most outstanding “theatrics,” but revels instead details of his own involvement “with two professional theater companies: Bacchus Productions and Hippodrome Theater” (p.21).

“Staging *Waiting for Godot* for the prisoners of Florida State Penitentiaries,” he confesses, “was an exhilarating experience, clearly at one with the simple fact that men waiting were watching a play

about men waiting. It led to my putting Shakespeare aside for a spell and, over the next six years, throwing myself into Beckett..." [*Shakespeare's Theater...* p. 13]. If not for publications on Rick Cluchey and the San Quentin Drama Workshop, the remarks about prison performances would be strikingly original—some twenty years ago. I do not intend to discredit the value of playing Beckett to prisoners or workers (because I also believe that "Beckett is not for a coterie," p. 124), but the subtitle *Interpretations for Performance* promises more than the book delivers. Notably, actors who turn to this book for ideas will discover that the author, while commenting on particular plays, drastically narrows the range of stage interpretation.

Mr. Homan writes with directness and verve, which makes this book attractive to students. Yet, as a *vade mecum*, it provides too little systematic information, and presumes close familiarity with Beckett's work; indeed, references to minute details sometimes fall like passwords, clear only to the initiated. The book undoubtedly has value as a testimonial of a long involvement with Beckett's works, but considered as a book of memories it has far too many footnotes. These, in turn, should be more scrupulous and accurate. I may not be doing full justice to Mr. Homan, for his study is not lacking in interesting perceptions and useful observations. If I emphasize its shortcomings, it is because the faults are more conspicuous than the merits. The remarkable experience which we surmise to be at the foundation of this project has born too little fruit.

**Review:** Angela Moorjani, *Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1982. 166 pp.

*Linda Ben-Zvi*

*Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* is a study in clarity and crispness. It is also an important addition to Beckett criticism. The intention of the work is stated on the first page: “This essay, in two parts, analyzes how Beckett’s novels undermine textual linearity, on the one hand, and the myths of self-transparency, on the other, by turning words into toys, writing into abysmal play.” Using play in several senses—as the narrative play of displacement and fragmentation that characterizes Beckett’s fiction, that “steeping in and out of levels of discourse,” as Moorjani describes it; as psychoanalytic play, Freud’s fort/da game wherein the child substitutes the toy for the absent mother, displacing and returning it as he works through his own frustration at abandonment by the parent; and as play techniques described by Melanie Klein—Moorjani analyzes Beckett’s fiction, particularly *Murphy*, *Watt*, and the trilogy. Given such broad categories as narratology and psychoanalytic theory, it is to Moorjani’s credit that the book, a concise 151 pages including a 14-page bibliography, while amply referring to current writing in both areas, and supplying excellent notes suggesting subsequent and more detailed forays into areas of interest, stays with Beckett, using the theories to illuminate the texts, and not, as in some studies, allowing the fiction to become lost in the welter of theoretical apparatus. What emerges are clear, structured discussions of the major novels and, in the case of *Molloy*, one of the best psychoanalytic readings available.

“Infinite reduplication” is what Moorjani calls Beckett’s preferred abysmal game, and in the section on narrative repetition, she offers examples of the unending forms such play takes, likening Beckett’s narrative fragmentations of his novels to Piranesi’s *Carceri* where labyrinthian constructions reduplicate and imprison without seeming end. *Watt* is described as a series of games, each a replication of the initial one Watt enjoys as he waits in the kitchen of Mr. Knott’s house on the eve of his entry there. The play with color, a “come and go” game, becomes the model for repeated encounters: Watt fading before the eyes of Hackett, as he fades before the eyes of Sam and of the station master in part 4. Each of these games leads not to unity or meaning but to further displacement, an unending series, mirror within mirror, box within box, or what Moorjani calls a *mise en abyme*, which breaks a syntagmatic chain by means of a paradigmatic series of events, sights, mental forays. Knott’s house becomes a narratological “dizzying mirror house and resonance chamber.”

The best discussion in this first section—as it is in the second part on thematic reduplication—is on *Molloy*. In both sections Moorjani offers helpful avenues into the text by applying her theory of abysmal play. Building from the discussion of *Watt* as a series of variations on a primal game, she reads *Molloy* as a narrative of the unconscious and the conscious, Molloy and Moran, fragments of one being, “simultaneous versions of the same story on different levels, “Molloy alive in the mind of Moran, the unconscious preceding the conscious in the text, but within the mind of Moran in the psychic framework of the novel. She also sees what she calls the preamble, the A and C section of the opening, as the third part of the work, the attempted meeting of the two. Thus Beckett, she

argues, again fractures the linearity of his story by this narrative displacement as he fractures the self of the character into two: Molloy identified with mother, the unconscious seeking fusion once more with the primary parent, Moran allied to the father, the law, yet finding himself moving toward his unconscious desires as he moves toward Molloy.

Moorjani continues the psychoanalytic reading of the novel in the second section of her book, and if there is a fault in her study, it is the separation of the two parts which would read better if connected rather than as discrete chapters causing the reader to move back and forth to gain a complete analysis of any novel under discussion. It is in the second part, on theme, where Moorjani provides a detailed systematic reading of the elements in *Molloy*, “psychoanalytic topology,” in relation to the game theory of Freud and Klein and Oedipal parallels. Describing how the child may receive conflicting messages, identifying with the father “be like him,” warned against taking his place with the mother, “don’t be like him,” Moorjani sketches the movement in the novel as a series of conflicting comings and goings of the male-oriented conscious level personified by Moran who identifies with the law—with religion, with order, with rules—yet at the same time desires to undermine his role and the laws he ascribes to, imputing to his son his desire to disobey, to kill the father, to run away.

The inner story of the unconscious personality, the Molloy section, is described as a commensurate battle of the self and identification with the mother, the primary scene of which is played out in the protracted section in Lousse’s garden. Here Moorjani’s reading is wonderful, carefully putting the pieces of the fractured encounter together: the killing of the dog named Teddy, Greek for God, the replacement of him by Molloy, the double messages “stay/don’t stay” all part of the oedipal myth, the son’s desire for and repulsion toward the mother. Moorjani concludes that while the oedipal myth is at work in the structuring and thematic unity of this part of the text, Molloy is actually an antioedipus, unable to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, receding from upright position to crawl, from Mother’s room back to the ditch “the dead yet unborn.” In her reading, Molloy’s and Moran’s meetings with spectre figures in both parts of the novel mirror the same psychic come and go of the fort/da game, the pull of don’t/do with commensurate desire to kill and embrace. Thus the images and orders of Youdi and Gaber can be read as the functioning of the law, ordering, contradicting, rescinding, expelling and returning the figures to their starting places. While Moorjani does not push her reading too far, she does make a strong case for the imagery that sustains the oedipal duplication in the work: the sixteen sucking stones (suck an image related to the mother-oriented Molloy) paralleled by the sixteen theological principles of Moran (law the province of the patriarchal father-connected Moran). She also compares the paradisiacal refuge of Lousse with the patriarchal garden and home of Moran. In both the fictive selves first seek refuge and then retreat.

While *Molloy* is clearly the center of this book, the work also has illuminating things to say about other Beckett novels, particularly about the chess game in *Murphy*, described in detail by Moorjani as yet another variation on a game of mirrors, a fort/da game with Murphy seeking a recognition of self that is impossible for him to achieve. She also beautifully describes the ending of that novel, Mr. Kelly flying his kite as a fort/da game. Another interesting point that she unfortunately does not pursue except in passing refers to *Watt*. Twice she comments on the novel being a compilation of Watt’s Augustinian, Sam’s Cartesian, Hackett’s empirical, and Arsene’s pre-Socratic logic—an archeology of western thought. This idea is worth developing in connection to the theme of game, particularly Beckett’s favorite game of devaluing philosophical theories.

In the concluding section of the study, Moorjani illustrates her theory of abysmal game once more by applying the term to the more recent fiction *Company* and *Mal vu mal dit*. This section of the work is less successful than the preceding discussions because of its brevity. More space would have given the author sufficient room for expanding what she does have to say about the two works.

Overall, *Abysmal Games* is a fine work, an important addition to Beckett criticism, offering a model of how allied theoretical investigations can provide ready tools for the analysis of fiction. Beckett's works clearly lend themselves to this type of investigation. After reading Moorjani's book, one has new ideas about the possibilities for further investigation, but does not have the feeling, so often experienced after reading a theoretical approach, that the theory has left the fiction buried below. Throughout this study, Beckett's works remain paramount—a credit to Moorjani's sensitive reading.