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Samuel Beckett and Ireland

Allée Samuel Beckett
Foxrock 1906 – Paris 1989
Ecrivain Irlandais
Prix Nobel de Litérature

The plaque containing this inscription was unveiled on 22 December 1999 by Jean Tiberi, the Mayor of Paris, who thus renamed a portion of l'avenue René Coty in the fourteenth arrondissement of Paris in honour of Samuel Beckett (Harrington 2004, 164). Some of the pieces of information contained on the plaque are unquestionable – he was born in Ireland and died in France; he was also awarded the Nobel prize in 1969. Others are not quite so, a point made by Karl Ragnar Gierow of the Swedish Academy in his Nobel prize presentation speech:

> Mix a powerful imagination with a logic in absurdum, and the result will be either a paradox or an Irishman. If it is an Irishman, you will get the paradox into the bargain. Even the Nobel Prize in Literature is sometimes divided. Paradoxically, this has happened in 1969, a single award being addressed to one man, two languages and a third nation, itself divided.[2]

Questioning the absolute validity of the inscription on the plaque it must be remembered that Beckett wrote in two languages, English and French, later on providing his own translation into the second language. The fact that he is treated as a representative of the two countries is noticeable in libraries where the works written by the great Nobel prize winner and the criticism concerning his output can be found simultaneously in the English (not Irish, though) and French sec-

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[2] Cf. K.R. Gierow presentation speech to the Swedish Academy: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/press.html [access: 20.05.2014].

tions. Furthermore, he spent most of his life in France, not in Ireland and openly made the confession that he "preferred France at war to Ireland at peace" (Shenker 147). Furthermore, the split in the Irish nation, mentioned by Gierow, seems to be reflected both in the artist's biography and output.

Samuel Beckett was born in an affluent village of Foxrock, eight miles from Dublin. The exact date of his birth is not quite certain, as he claimed to have been born on Good Friday the 13th of April 1906, while "his birth certificate records the date as the thirteenth of May, not April" (Knowlson 1996, 23). Being a part of the Irish Protestant minority in a mainly Catholic community, Beckett must have felt isolated which may account for the recurrence of themes of estrangement, loneliness, solitude and separation in his *oeuvre*. Vivian Mercier, an Irish critic of Beckett's output, commented on the similarity between the situation of his own and that of Beckett:

> The typical Anglo-Irish boy … learns that he is not quite Irish almost before he can talk; later he learns that he is far from being English either. The pressure on him to become either wholly English or wholly Irish can erase segments of his individuality for good and all. "Who am I" is the question that every Anglo-Irishman must answer, even if it takes him a lifetime as it did Yeats. (26)

Years later, asked about his childhood, Becket described it as

> uneventful. You might say I had a happy childhood … although I had little talent for happiness. My parents did everything that could make a child happy. But I was often lonely. We were brought up like Quakers. My father did not beat me, nor did my mother run away from home. (Bair 14)[3]

His life in his parents' home was not a happy one, however, mainly because of his domineering mother. Then, after his father's death in 1933, his health deteriorated (both mentally and physically) to such a great extent that he decided to undergo psychoanalytical therapy. The letters from that time which he wrote to his friend, Tom MacGreevy, clearly indicate that his mother was the main source of his problems (Knowlson 1996, 178). She was, as it were, a combination of opposites – she was both loving and domineering, attending and demanding, a mother which would nowadays be defined by the term "toxic." The conflicts between them were of different kinds, her basic accusations concerning his excessive drinking as well as having no regular job and the need of financial support resulting from it. As a result, he left Ireland and spent some time in Germany to return to Ireland in 1937. Knowlson (1996, 251) writes that "it is difficult to know

[3] A. Reid. "The Reluctant Prizeman." *The Arts*. November 1969, 63.

exactly what precipitated their final and most bitter quarrel, which caused Beckett to leave Cooldrinagh and Ireland, never to live there again. If it was a single event rather than a slow build up of annoyances and disputes, then it occurred between September 21 and September 28." He was no longer living with his mother on the 28th, when he wrote a letter to McGreevy which was sent from Imperial Hotel in Waterford:

> It is a great relief to me to get away from home, where the position between mother and me has become impossible. So impossible that I intend not to sleep at home again until I leave the country, which will be I hope next week. … I as wrong in thinking I was well enough to deal with her and with myself in relation to her. Now I give up une fois pour toutes [once and for all]. (Knowlson 1996, 252)[4]

The quarrel may have concerned his mother's decision to rent the big house and move to a smaller one about which he wrote to McGreevy a week earlier (Beckett 2009, 548–551). It may have been the consequence of his having caused an accident which resulted in their losing the car. It may have also been connected with a trial during which he was a witness:

> May Beckett was outraged by her son's involvement in a notorious literary court case in which Harry Sinclair (Peggy's uncle) had taken a libel action against the well-known writer-cum-medic Oliver St John Gogarty (himself immortally lampooned in James Joyce's *Ulysses* as 'Buck Mulligan'). Gogarty had given an anti-Semitic and unflattering depiction of the complainant's family in his memoir *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* (1937). … The defence councel's skilful attempts to discredit the prosecution's witness relied on depicting Beckett as a blasphemous and decadent 'intellectual' living in Paris, a byword for corruption by the rather censorious Irish standards of the time. … His mother was mortified by the public humiliation: the case was widely reported in the Dublin newspapers. (McDonald 13)

During the trial, on being asked whether he called himself "a Christian, Jew or Atheist," Beckett replied: "None of the three" (Bair 168). Most probably the fact that Beckett, according to the *Irish Times*, was called by the barrister J.M. Fitzgerald the "bawd and blasphemer from Paris" and "wretched creature" (Bair 268)[5] and that her son denied having any religious beliefs was the last straw

[4] S. Beckett to T. McGreevy, 28 September 1937, Trinity College Dublin Library. It is noteworthy to notice that already as early as 1937 he was using English and French simultaneously.

[5] *Irish Times*, November 23–27, 1937.

in the conflict between May Beckett and her son. After the trial and the ensuing quarrel between Beckett and his mother, still at Cooldrinagh, with his mother having gone away for some time, on October 6th, in a bitter letter to Thomas McGreevy he stated:

> … I am marveling at the pleasantness of Cooldrinagh without her. And I could not wish her anything better than to feel the same when I am away. But I don't wish her anything at all, neither good nor ill. I am what her savage loving has made me, and it is good that one of us should accept that finally. As it has been all the time, she wanting me to behave in a way agreeable to her in her October of analphabetic gentility, or to her friends ditto, or to the business code of father idealized – dehumanized – ("When ever in doubt what [to] do. Ask yourself what would darling Bill have done"). … I simply don't want to see her or write to her or hear from her. (Beckett 2009, 552)

According to Beckett's biographer, Deirdre Bair:

> May gave an impression of religious rigidity to her neighbours and fellow practitioners, she took her sons to services, said short bedtime prayers and an occasional grace before dinner with them, but her own feelings were governed by the rote performance of ritual observance and not by any true belief. This dichotomy between practice and belief bothered the constantly curious Sam from his earliest memories of religious practice. … the last religious experience of any importance he remembers was the first Communion which followed his Confirmation. (18)[6]

Beckett's statement made during the trial and his later remarks concerning religion indicate that he considered it to be "only irksome and let it go. My mother and brother got no value from their religion when they died. At the moment of crisis it has no more depth than an old school tie" (Driver 24). His attitude to problems pertaining to religion indicates one of many splits in his personality. On the one hand, he was raised by his mother in a way which could indicate that he would become a Christian. There is a well known picture of small Beckett, with his hands clasped, saying prayers at his mother's knee. Cronin writes: "the photograph is a fake. Beatrice Elvery's sister Dorothy, who was an art student, wanted to paint a subject picture called 'Bedtime.' Four-year-old Sam 'was just right size and age,' so she asked May if he could pose for her. Realizing the practical difficulty of repeated sittings, she took a photograph to paint from" (20). His mother is said to have read the Bible to him daily, which, as pointed out by Cronin (20),

[6] A. Reid. "The Reluctant Prizeman." *op. cit.*, 64.

might be an exaggeration. Yet it is true that the set of books he wanted to have near him comprised "his own works and those of Joyce, various early editions of the works of Samuel Johnson, French and English dictionaries, and works of reference including *The Companion to Music*, Bibles and Bible Concordances" (Cronin 501).

Writing about Beckett's essay *Proust*, published in 1931,Cronin notices that

> there is certainly a general impression of an attitude to art which partakes of a sort of religious fervour, or of an attempt to make a sort of surrogate religion of art. This attempt is not uncommon among hitherto religious young people who discover art at the same time as they are in process of abandoning religion. Beckett would deny in later life that he had ever been a believer or that religious belief had ever made much appeal to him. The religious vocabulary of his *Proust* makes an opposite impression. (147)

It is undoubtedly true that most of Beckett's works make references to or directly quote the Bible, his first play, *Waiting for Godot*, being a good example here. Many critics and theatre lovers have been trying to solve the puzzle of the mysterious Godot, some of them indicating that it was God[7]. Beckett himself rejected such a reading. When asked about the identity of Godot, Beckett answered: "If I knew who Godot was, I would have said so in the play" (Bair 382). He also rejected the religious interpretation saying: "If Godot were God, I would have called him that" (Bair 382–383), and "Christianity is mythology with which I am perfectly familiar, and so I use it. But not in this case" (Bair 186). Peter Woodthorpe, who played Estragon in the British premiere directed by Peter Hall, recalls: "Beckett also said to me about 'Godot' that he deeply regretted calling it 'Godot,' because everybody interpreted it as God. Now that he saw it in English. And all the things people made of it. He said it had nothing to do with God. He was almost passionate about it" (123–4).

Yet the playwright conceded on another occasion: "It would be fatuous of me to pretend that I am not aware of the meanings attached to the word 'Godot', and the opinion of many that it means 'God'. But you must remember – I wrote the play in French, and if I did have that meaning in my mind, it was somewhere in my unconscious and I was not overtly aware of it" (Bair 557). This remark is interesting, especially, as Vivian Mercier argues, if one remembers that "Beckett has often stressed the strong unconscious impulses that partly control his writing; he has even spoken of being in a 'trance' when he writes" (87).

As early as in 1935, Beckett wrote about himself to his friend, Tom McGreevy as of one who seems "never to have had the least faculty or disposition for the

[7] For the discussion of this issue see Bair, 382–383, Uchman 1984.

supernatural" (Beckett 2009, 257). Mary Bryden, who has written a book *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, in which she concentrates on Becket's texts, not life, remarks in the "Introduction" (1): "when Charles Juliet enquired in 1977 whether or not he had been able to rid himself of the influence of religion, he replied enigmatically that this was the case 'dans mon comportement extérieur, sans doute. … Mais pour le reste…' [in my external behaviour, no doubt. … But as for the rest…]."[8]. Commenting on the above statement Mary Bryden concedes:

> What is not made clear by the ellipses is whether a complete clearing away of all religious baggage is considered to be a desirable project, or not. On a literary level, Beckett continued to be responsive to the beauty of the King James Bible, its verses often throbbing below the surface of the Beckettian text, or being moulded or perverted to suit the author's purpose. What also emerges from Beckett's oeuvre is a familiarity with Christian belief and practice, and a wide knowledge of theological and spiritual writers. … the hypothesized God who emerges from Beckett's texts is one who is both cursed for his perverse absence and cursed for his surveillant presence. He is by turns dismissed, satirized, or ignored, but he, and his tortured son, are never definitely discarded. If God is not apprehended in the here-and-now, there is nevertheless a perceived need, a potential opening, for a salvific function which a Deity could fulfill. (2)[9]

The length of the preceding section concerning religion may be justified by pointing out three aspects of this issue. Firstly, its importance in Samuel Beckett's life and art; secondly, the specific role religion plays in Ireland, where it is not only a matter of private affairs of an individual but also a political concern and thirdly, it seems to be, at least, one of, if not the most important reason of Beckett's decision to part not only with his mother but also with his motherland.

When Beckett decided to leave Ireland and go to France in 1937, he knew what living in it was like because he had been in there in June 1926 on a bicycle trip and, as his biographer, Deirdre Bair argues "this brief visit to France marked the beginning of Beckett's fascination with that country" (49). He had also held a teaching position in the Ecole Normale Supérieur in Paris between 1928 and 1930 (Knowlson 1996, 96). After having argued that "Although Beckett loved the Irish countryside and its ordinary people, and his writings are full of Ireland, he had become convinced that he could never function properly there as a writer," Knowlson quotes a letter he received from Morris Sinclair on 11 October 1993:

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[8] Ch. Juliet. *Rencontre avec Samuel Beckett*. Paris: Editions Fata Morgana, 1986, 50.

[9] For the discussion of the importance of religion in Beckett's output see, apart from the already mentioned Bryden, also, among others: Butler and Zeifman.

> Living in Ireland was confinement for Sam. He came up against the Irish censorship. He could not swim in the Irish literary scene or in the Free State politics the way W.B Yeats did. … But the big city, the larger horizon, offered him the freedom of comparative anonymity (Belacqua seeking the pub where he was unknown) and stimulation instead of Dublin oppression, jealousy, intrigue and gossip. (Knowlson 1996, 253)

Years later, Beckett commented on his decision, mentioning similar issues: "I didn't like living in Ireland. You know the kind of thing – theocracy, censorship of books, that kind of thing. I preferred to live abroad" (Bair 269)[10]. The Act of 16th July 1929, a bill meant to control and suppress obscene publications in Ireland, was strongly criticised by Beckett in his article "Censorship in the Saorstat," written in 1934. He discussed the definition of the word "indecent" provided by the bill, "the constitution of and procedure to be adopted by the Censorship of Publications Board" (84) and argued that "The Register of Prohibited Publications is a most happy idea, constituting as it does, after the manner of Boston's Black Book, a free and permanent advertisement of those books and periodicals in which, be their strictly literary status never so humble, inheres the a priori excellence that they have annoyed the specialist in common sense" (86). He also wrote: "Part 3 sets forth with loving care the restrictions on publication of reports of judicial proceedings. No longer may the public lap up the pathological titbit or the less frigid proceedings for divorce, nullity of marriage, judicial separation and restitution of conjugal rights" (86). Towards the end of the article, he stated:

> Finally to amateurs of morbid sociology this measure may appeal as a curiosity of panic legislation, the painful tension between life and thought finding issue in a constitutional belch, the much reading that is a weariness exorcised in 21 sections. Sterilization of the mind and apotheosis of the litter suit well together. Paradise peopled with virgins and the earth with decorticated multiparas. (Beckett 87)

When the article was published in 1935, "To bring it up to date, he added a paragraph about books most recently banned, including *More Pricks* and his own listing number (465)" (Bair 217). In 1958, together with Sean O'Casey, he asserted his unconditional resistance to Irish censorship in connection with

> the *Tóstal*, an annual festival of plays and music held each spring in Dublin. … The archbishop of Dublin refused to offer the votive Mass which traditionally opened the *Tóstal* if the O'Casey and Joyce offerings were performed as

[10] I. Shenker. „Moody Man of Letters." *The New York Times*. 6 May 1956. Sec. 2: x, 1, 3.

> submitted. The council was unwilling to override the archbishop's veto. As a result, a dramatized version of *Ulysses*, called *Bloomsday*, was quickly banned, and O'Casey's play, *The Drums of Father Ned; or, A Mickrocosm of Ireland*, would be accepted only if O'Casey agreed "to certain structural alterations"[11]. O'Casey refused. When Beckett learned the story, he withdrew permission for his plays. He was so enraged that as a further protest he refused to allow his plays to be performed anywhere in the Republic of Ireland. As far as Beckett was concerned, the entire episode was one more example of all that he found wrong with Ireland. Of all the disappointments and frustrations connected with the presentation of his work, this was the one which caused the most lasting rancor. He was unusually vituperative when he talked about the incident, and he used it to illustrate his theory that the Catholic Church, toward which he had long been hostile, and the British government were responsible for the surprising number of great writers who had appeared in Ireland in the short time since the nineteenth century. (Bair 492)

The ban lasted until May 1960, when "Beckett authorised Cyril Cusack to organise two performances of *Krapp's Last Tape* in Dublin, a decision that resulted eventually in Beckett giving permission for his plays to be performed on Irish stages" (Morin 15).

The surprising number of great Irish writers mentioned by Bair brings into focus the issue of Beckett's relationship with the Irish literary tradition. In his article entitled "Samuel Beckett and the Countertradition" John P. Harrington argues: "Gregory, Yeats and Martyn had imagined a single school of Irish drama which would reflect unanimity of values in a single, recognizable style" (2004, 165) and states that when Beckett went to Paris in 1928 "he joined the circle of a large number of other young Irish intellectuals and writers interested in international rather than exclusively national issues and aesthetics" (2004, 167). In 1934 Beckett wrote an essay entitled "Recent Irish Poetry" in which he stated: "I propose, as a rough principle of individuation in this essay, the degree in which the younger Irish poets evince awareness of the new thing that has happened, or the old thing that has happened again, namely the breakdown of the object, whether current, historical, mythical or spook" (70). He divided the poets into "antiquarians, delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods" and others "the former in the majority, the latter kindly noticed by Mr. W.B. Yeats as 'the fish that lie gasping on the shore,' suggesting that they might at least learn to expire with an air" (70). In the essay Beckett praised the poetry of Tom McGreevy, Lyle Donaghy, Arland Ussher, Denis Devlin and Brian Coffy (all of them, coincidentally, his friends), arguing that they look for in-

[11] E. O'Casey, October 30, 1974, Dublin.

spiration in French poets like Tristan Corbiére, Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue, the Surrealists and T.S. Eliot. He distinguished them from the "antiquarians" or "Celtic twilighters" and considered them to represent "the new" in Ireland. "He denounced the self-congratulatory insularity of Revivalists and neo-Revivalists, describing the Revival as the source of an aesthetic empty of meaning – a 'flight from self-awareness'" (Morin 33–34). According to Knowlson, in the essay Beckett disparages "the mythologizer in Yeats. Beckett does this, however, only with the intention of highlighting a challenging, more subtle Yeats. He always loved and admired much of Yeats's poetry, while finding certain (though not all) of his plays as dull as a ditchwater" (181). Morin comments on Beckett's letters written to McGreevy concerning his opinions about Dublin productions of the plays he attended: "Lady Gregory's theatrical techniques were, in his view, particularly mediocre; after witnessing a revival of *Dervorgilla* in 1934, he described the play as unconditionally vulgar in its conception and execution[12]. … Clearly, for Beckett, Lady Gregory's use of ancient myth had disturbing resonances in post-independence Ireland. This is confirmed in his account of Eileen Crowe's performance as Dervorgilla; calling her an 'ineffable bitch', he compared her to 'Frau Lot petrified into a symbolic condemnation of free trade,'[13] an embodiment of Irish economic isolationism" (Morin 24).

Morin argues that "Beckett's mixed feelings regarding the Abbey were not muted over time, having become established as a playwright, he maintained a clearly expressed distance from the Abbey's naturalism, despite indicating the extent of his interest in Revivalist drama" (22). He greatly appreciated the works of Sean O'Casey, supported him during the *Tóstal* events in 1958 and contributed to a special tribute on March 30th 1960, the playwright's eightieth birthday, sending a letter which was published in *Irish Times*: "To my great compatriot, Sean O'Casey, from France where he is honoured, I send my enduring gratitude and homage" (Bair 518).

When Samuel Beckett started writing for the stage, he did so in French and not in his mother tongue. His decision may have been due to the fact that the use of the still to some extent foreign language made him more sensitive to the choice of concrete expressions and structures specific for that language. Some of the critics, though, interpret his decision to write in French as a sign of his breaking up with Ireland and becoming a part of the new, French reality. Later, he translated his works into English. As time passed, more and more often would he write first in English and then become his self-translator. Ann Beer writes at the beginning of her article entitled "Samuel Beckett's Bilingualism," that the cycling tour to France and the time spent in Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris (1928–30) "were

[12] Beckett's letter to McGreevy, 5 October 1930, letter 11.
[13] Ibid.

enough to confirm the love-affair with a language that lasted throughout Beckett's life. In both critical and imaginative writing, he seemed to grasp that the 'old ego,' both 'minister of dullness' and 'agent of security,'[14] could be left behind, and the new ego welcomed, through the shifts in consciousness and expression that an acquired language made possible" (211). A similar opinion is voiced by other critics discussed by Morin: "Although writing in French was a natural development for a bilingual writer living in France, Beckett's turn towards French has been depicted as a 'contradiction,' an 'abandonment,' a 'betrayal' and a form of 'linguistic denial' "[15](55).

Herbert Blau, who often worked with Beckett, asked him about his use of two languages and thus recalls the occasion: "What enlivened and disturbed him most was my remark about the language of his dramas. I said that by writing in French he was evading some part of himself. (pause.) He said yes, there were a few things about himself he didn't like, that French had the right 'weakening' effect."[16]. Referring to the above remarks, Bair states that "Blau was not the only one to comment on Beckett's evasion of self; Pierre Schneider, however, suggested that writing in French was not so much evasion as an attempt to state his deepest thoughts without actually confronting the inner sphere in which these thoughts were located" (516).

While translating his works, Beckett often introduced changes, some of which were meant to bridge the differences between the two different languages and cultures. In the case of *En attendant Godot*, for instance, he altered the names of places and other language specific allusions. And so, while speaking about his pipe in the French version, Pozzo mentions his "Abdullah" (*En attendant* 48), whereas in the English version he refers to his "Kapp and Paterson," an Irish product (*Waiting* 35). Similarly, in the speech of Lucky (*En attendant*, 59–62 and *Waiting* 42–45), the French place names have been replaced by English ones or, as in this case, an Irish one – "Normandie" gives way to "Connemara," the western region of Galway in Ireland.

Even though this drama was originally written in French, many critics notice its Irishness. Commenting on the Dublin production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1956, Leventhal wrote in his review:

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[14] S. Beckett. *Proust and Three Dialogues*. London: John Calder, 1965, 21.

[15] L. Janvier. "Samuel Beckett par lui-měme." *Samuel Beckett. L'Herne*. Eds. T. Bishop and R. Federman. Paris: Editions de L'Herne, 1976, 46 (Janvier's entries for "bilingue" and "contradiction" coincide); L. Chamberlain. "The Same Old Stories. Beckett's Poetics of Translation." *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*. Eds. A.W. Friedman, Ch. Rossman and D. Scherzer. University Park: Pennsylvania University Press. 1987, 17; W.J. McCormack. *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History.* Cork: Cork University Press, 1994,18; D. Kiberd. *Irish Classics*. London: Granta, 2000, 590.

[16] H. Blau. "Meanwhile, Follow the Bright Angels." *Tulane Drama Review.* V (September 1960): 90–91. Quoted after Bair 516.

> Mr Beckett's origin has caused the view to be widely accepted that the whole conception of *Waiting for Godot* is Irish, a fact which the original French has been unable to conceal, it is claimed. The Pike Theatre production lends support to this view, and it may well be that *Waiting for Godot* will go down in the local records as a lineal descendant of the works of the high literary kings of the Irish dramatic renascence. It is understood that there is a proposal to translate the play into Irish which would assist in bringing about a general acceptance here of this theory. (Harrington 1991, 546)[17]

"When the Irish-language version of *Godot* promised by Leventhal finally materialized for two nights in 1971," Harrington writes, "the *Irish Times* reviewer of *Ag Fanacht Le Godot* offered the opinion, in Irish, that 'Until I saw *Godot* in Irish I didn't properly understand how exactly Beckett takes hold of the Irish literary heritage'[18] – the literary heritage, that is, rather than the general cultural heritage" (Harrington 1991, 549).

Beckett himself was reluctant to admit there were echoes of Ireland in his output. When Jacob Schwarz, a book dealer and a friend of Beckett, got four typescripts of *Krapp's Last Tape*, he wrote an appreciative letter to the playwright, telling him how much this short play reminded him of Ireland. Bair writes: "This made Beckett angry, and he corrected Schwartz icily, saying the play had nothing to do with Ireland and had only been written as a vehicle for Pat Magee[19]. Schwartz's comment was too close to the truth, which he did not want to confront" (494). All the same, the references to Ireland in the play, as in most of Beckett's dramas, have been noticed and discussed by a number of critics[20]. Even though unwilling to do so, Beckett himself would occasionally indicate an Irish reference. Such was the case, for instance, with *Not I*:

> "I knew that woman in Ireland," Beckett said, "I knew who she was – not 'she' specifically, one single woman, but there were so many of those old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And I heard 'her' saying what I wrote in *Not I*. I actually heard it."[21]. He wrote *Not I* in English, explaining almost apologetically "I don't know in advance what language I will write in,"[22] but in this case, it seemed only logical that he convey the anguish of an Irish woman in English rather than in French. (Bair 622–623)

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17 A.J. Leventhal. "Dramatic Commentary." *The Dublin Magazine.* No 31. 1, 1956: 52–54.

18 Ch. Murray. „Beckett Production in Ireland. A Survey." *Irish University Review.* 14. 1, 1984: 103–125. 107 n. 9.

19 S. Beckett, letter to J. Schwartz, April 5, 1958, HRC, Austin, Texas.

20 See, for instance, Knowlson 1992, 91 and Libera 641 n. 35 and 650 n. 91.

21 S. Beckett to D. Bair, A. Schneider, B. Whitelaw, A.J. Leventhal and others.

22 Adam Tarn.

The Irish woman from Beckett's description seems to have been reflected in yet another character in his output: Mrs Rooney (Maddy) in *All That Fall.* Similarly to the case of *Not I*, also this play was written first in English, only later to be translated by the playwright into French. And, again, the initial choice of the language is not surprising if one takes into consideration the fact that the issues he wanted to focus on centred to a great extent on Irish problems – it did not seem to be reasonable, for instance, to castigate the attitude of the Irish to religion and the Church or Gaelic language in French. On the whole, *All That Fall* seems to be one of the most "Irish" plays in the Beckett canon. In the character of Miss Fitt Beckett draws a highly critical portrait of a hypocritical Dublin Protestant. When she is in church, as she puts it, she is "alone with [her] Maker" and she does not notice anyone, not "even the sexton himself": "when he takes up the collection, he knows it is useless to pause before me. I simply do not see the plate, or bag, whatever it is they use, how could I?" (Beckett 1984, 22). A similar attitude to money is expressed by Mr Rooney who regrets Maddy did not cancel the boy which cost them a sixpence (28) and in a long speech argues that staying at home is cheaper than going to work: "It is clear that by lying at home in bed, day and night, winter and summer, with a change of pyjamas once a fortnight, you would add very considerably to your income" (33). Mr Rooney seems to be obsessed not only with money but also with the thoughts concerning language, which becomes one of the subjects of their conversation:

> MR ROONEY: … Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think that we were struggling with a dead language.
> MRS ROONEY: Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating.
> MR ROONEY: I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear myself.
> MRS ROONEY: Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our poor dear Gaelic, there is that to be said. (34)

Slightly later on, Beckett gently mocks the outcome of the Gaelic language movement. While speaking about going to the toilet at the station, Mr Rooney says: "Jerry led me to the men's, or Fir as they call it now, from Vir, Viris I suppose, the V becoming F in accordance with Grimm's Law" (35). This passage, as untranslatable, is omitted in the French version, the same being done by Antoni Libera in his translation. In the notes to his rendition of *All That Fall* he explains that this fragment refers to the situation in Ireland in the twenties when attempts were made to reintroduce the original Gaelic terms which had been removed by the British (732–3 n. 54). Beckett also pokes fun on Mr Rooney's linguistic competence/incompetence slightly later, when he has him explain that the word "buff" comes from "buffalo" (37).

Discussing the play Morin argues: "Synge's influence is prominent in the radio play *All That Fall*, in which Beckett develops a musical, stylised form of Hiberno-English that recalls Synge's dramatic language. Hiberno-English is used to emphasise the undefined existence of the characters as verbal constructs" (38)[23]. It can be argued that Synge's influence on Beckett is also discernible in their use of narrative as an important element of the structure of their dramas. Kilroy argues that "It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the story telling mode in Irish drama because it is so pervasive. The classic example is Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907)" (16). Many critics point out "the predominance of speech-based action and monologue in contemporary Irish drama" (Grene 72)[24]. Grene points out that "theatre becomes the site of narration and the narratives are confessional self-representations rather than the representation of community and nation" (73). The confessional quality of the numerous narratives provided by Beckettian characters is unquestionable. In the study of the use of narrative in the plays of Beckett and Pinter, Morrison argues that the "tension between life and story, self and story fills Beckett's work," in his drama it is extremely important "because there not only does this tension provide a major thematic concern but the narrative form itself has been employed as a significant new dramatic technique" (1). The significance of narrative in Beckett's drama has yet another reason – Beckett's vision of life which he aptly described in his Proust essay. Thrown into their existence, his characters have to expiate for "the eternal sin of having been born" (Beckett 1987, 67). Being the victims of "the double headed monster of damnation and salvation – Time" (11), they have to go on living and suffering, the only solution in their tragic situation being the employment of "Habit" (18–19). Their habitual activities consist mainly of talking, telling stories and inventing different kinds of games and pastimes.

The importance of telling a story in Beckett's dramatic *oeuvre* may be used as an argument supporting the notion of Beckett's Irishness. The Irish echoes can be found in all his writings, a point raised by Knowlson in reference to *Waiting for Godot*:

> The play […] springs from Beckett's Irish background, and not simply in the sense that the English translation contains actual Irish phrases or sentence structures. Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky have cosmopolitan names. But the world they inhabit – of sleeping in ditches, waiting by the roadside, eating scraps from chicken bones – the lineage of the tramps, and the less easily defined "feel" of the characters (even in French) is unmistakably Irish. As so often

[23] See: J. Knowlson. "Beckett and John Millington Synge." *Frescoes of the Skull. The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*. J. Knowlson and J. Pilling. London: John Calder, 1979. 259–274.

[24] See, for instance, Deane 12, Kearney 235 and Szczawińska.

> in Beckett, his inspiration is literary: the world of John Millington Synge's tinkers and beggars. Beckett admitted to feeling a great debt to Synge. (1996, 343)

Beckett's own attitude to Ireland seems to be ambivalent. On the one hand, "Since 1950 and his mother's death, he had been saying that he was finished with Ireland and would not go there again. Now [1968], at last, he hoped fervently that his words were true, and he has never returned to Ireland since" (Bair 601). When, in 1969, he received the Nobel Prize in literature, he clearly indicated he did not want to be associated with Ireland:

> The literary community of the world celebrated the award, with the exception of Ireland, which characteristically refused to recognize a native son who had turned his back on his country and his language. The Irish were also incensed at the manner in which the prize was to be awarded. Beckett could not be present at the festivities; the laureate in literature traditionally addressed the academy and he had no intention of putting himself on public display. Also, traditionally, when a winner is not present at the award ceremonies, his country's ambassador receives it in his stead. In this instance, Beckett sent word that he did not wish to be represented by the Irish ambassador, Tadgh Seosamh O'Hodhrain, but wanted Linton to receive it instead. (Bair 609)

On the other hand, however, when in 1959 Trinity College enquired whether he would receive an honorary doctorate of letters, he consented and received it "at commencement ceremonies that year on July 2, in Dublin" (Bair 503–504). It can be argued that while Beckett remained hostile towards the Irish Church and government, he had a soft spot for some Irish people and places (Trinity being one of them).

"After the Nobel Prize (1969)," Ackerley argues, "the Irish made numerous attempts to colonize him" (277)[25]. Also the two cultures, English (not only Irish) and French, make efforts to claim him as their "own." Ann Beer argues: "As Beckett passes into literary history, his admirers may wonder where, if anywhere, this Parisian Irishman and his work belong" (110). This duality of Beckett and his work is also noticed by Katharine Worth who points out in her book entitled *The Irish Drama of Europe*, that Beckett is "an Irishman who lives in France, writes with equal facility in French and English, regularly translates himself from one to another and always keeps in his English an Irish lilt" (241). Similarly, in his book entitled *A Colder Eye. The Modern Irish Writers*, Hugh Kenner argues that Beckett "is not Irish as Irishness is defined today by the Free State" and, as an alternative, he is willing to be the last Anglo-Irishman" (270).

[25] For the discussion of this issue see Ackerkey 277 and Morin 4–7.

It is extremely difficult to provide a simple answer to many complex questions concerning Beckett's identity and the status of his writing in the literary tradition: Was he an Irishman or Frenchman and, consequently, which national literary tradition should we indicate as his? Was he a modernist or a postmodernist? The answers seem to have been provided, perhaps, by Beckett himself on two occasions. He told Tom Driver: "The key word in my plays is 'perhaps'" (Driver 23). And Beckett's essay on Joyce's *Work in Progress*, entitled "Dante … Bruno. Vico … Joyce" starts with a sentence which can be taken to be a warning given to all trying to provide simple, often simplistic categorizations: "The danger is in the neatness of classifications" (19).

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Jadwiga Uchman

Samuel Beckett a Irlandia

(Streszczenie)

Artykuł stanowi bardzo obszerne i szczegółowe studium złożonych relacji Becketta z Irlandią jako krajem oraz z irlandzkością pojmowaną jako stan ducha. Autorka wyczerpująco omawia fakty biograficzne, wypowiedzi Becketta oraz krytyków, a także same dramaty, aby oddać całą niejednoznaczność i nerwowość relacji autora *Czekając na Godota* do własnego kraju. Przy okazji artykuł staje się wyczerpującym wprowadzeniem do całej twórczości Irlandczyka, wskazując jednocześnie na tak ważne elementy jego dzieła i krytycznej recepcji, jak: problem języka, problem przekładu czy rolę biografii w kształtowaniu się twórczości tego autora.
Key words: Samuel Beckett; Irish drama; Modernism

Biogram

Jadwiga Uchman jest kierownikiem Zakładu Dramatu i Dawnej Literatury Angielskiej w Instytucie Anglistyki na Uniwersytecie Łódzkim. Jej zainteresowania badawcze obejmują dramat współczesny, w tym zwłaszcza dramat poetycki, teatr absurdu, filmowe adaptacje współczesnego dramatu, a także twórczość Samuela Becketta, Harolda Pintera i Toma Stopparda. Opublikowała następujące książki: *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett* (Łódź, 1987), *Reality, Illusion, Theatricality: A Study of Tom Stoppard* (Łódź, 1998) oraz *Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. Playwrights and Directors* (Łódź, 2011).