

**DRAFF conference (5–6 August 2016)
and Samuel Beckett Summer School
(7–12 August 2016), Trinity College Dublin**

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Between 5 and 6 August 2016, Trinity College Dublin hosted the first DRAFF conference devoted to Samuel Beckett. On the first day four panels explored Beckett's fundamental sounds, poetry, correspondence and politics. The day finished with a keynote speaker presentation. Dirk van Hulle from the University of Antwerp discussed the value of passages that Beckett deleted from his manuscripts. Van Hulle made a brilliant parallel between the phenomenon of *pentimenti* in painting and Beckett's writing. *Pentimenti* is "repainting", in Beckett's case we can talk of "rewriting". Van Hulle stressed that the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project helps to trace all variety of versions of his texts. The second day of the conference tackled issues of perception, translation and language. In the second panel, Aleksandra Wachacz and Bartosz Lutostański from the University of Gdańsk discussed Beckett translations by Antoni Libera, especially *Waiting for Godot* and *Company*. They pointed out several inconsistencies in Libera's translations and tried to assess their value as "perfected" translations (a term used by Libera). Mark Nixon from the University of Reading, the keynote speaker on the second day, presented his work on editing Beckett's *German Diaries*, which most probably will be

published in late 2017. He noted that not only are the *German Diaries* a text by Beckett but most importantly they are a “pan-opticum of German society of the time”.

The conference finished with a concert supported by the German Embassy in Dublin. The string quartet Ensemble Ficino performed works by Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert, both often mentioned in Beckett’s works.

The afternoon of 7 August saw an event shared by the conference and the Samuel Beckett Summer School. For the first time, a selection of Beckett’s poems was read in French, English and Irish; the texts were shown on a screen. The reading was given by Mouth on Fire, an Ireland-based theatre company. The same poems read in three different languages called up three different emotional dimensions. Even though most of the audience did not know a word of Irish, the whole concept was applauded and welcomed very enthusiastically.

Each day of the following week commenced with a lecture which was followed by an afternoon seminar of choice: “Beckett’s Manuscripts” conducted by Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle, “Bilingual Beckett” by Nadia Louar, “Beckett and Music” by Catherine Laws and the “Samuel Beckett Laboratory” run by Nick Johnson and Jonathan Heron. In the evenings, a variety of social and artistic events brought together the participants of the Summer School. Some were open to the public.

Day 1: The Samuel Beckett Summer School opened with a lecture by Rónan McDonald on “Valuing Beckett”. McDonald claimed that it is difficult to talk about the value of literature in general, but especially about Beckett’s value. Among reasons for this is Beckett’s status as cultural capital. Moreover, Beckett’s writing is anchored in his biography. From the reader’s perspective, we have no language to answer the question “what is that thing in Beckett that we value, that we like?” The second lecture by Angela Moorjani was entitled “Beckett’s Containers or What the Archive Tells Us About Beckett and Buddhism”. This lecture was particularly interesting as Moorjani argued that the latest advances in Beckett studies enable us to

establish a connection between Beckett and Buddhism through Schopenhauer, whom Beckett read avidly. Although Beckett was not interested in this strand of oriental philosophy, there are similarities between his and Schopenhauer's views on compassion, for example, which, in the case of the latter, result from a strong interest in Buddhism and thorough studies of ancient treatises.

The discussion continued in less formal circles in the evening. A welcome reception in Trinity Library was an occasion to meet and exchange ideas.

Day 2: Matthew Feldman opened the second day with his lecture on "...suggesting pursuit of knowledge at some period' On Preparing Samuel Beckett's Philosophy Notes for Publication". He gave an outline of the main philosophers read by Beckett. A variety of different thinkers and thoughts find reflection in Beckett's notes, which apparently lack the last few pages. Nevertheless, Feldman attempted to estimate whether the notes constitute any kind of "whole" and what story the notes tell. David Pattie followed this fascinating set of considerations with his "Other Archives" lecture in which he presented two types of looking at (any) archive: *centripetal* and *centrifugal*. A centripetal archive is about reading inwards. It presents material that leads us back to the artist, illuminates working practices and echoes the narrative constructed around the artist. On the other hand, a centrifugal archive reads outwards, from the artist, out to the wider world. This kind of material mediates between the artist and other artists. Feldman claims that in this case "material is stuff" which moves us towards interaction with the outer world. At this point, "stuff" can be defined as "everyday material, accessible to the subject's senses and produced also by aesthetic practice".

The evening event was open to the public. Barry McGovern, an actor who has performed Beckett texts many times, read excerpts from, among others, *Mercier and Camier* in the newly renovated premises of the General Post Office in Dublin.

Day 3: Before the field trip around Beckett country, only one lecture took place. Catherine Laws spoke about “‘Headaches among the Overtones’. Music in the Work of Samuel Beckett”. Firstly, Laws reviewed the presence of music in Beckett’s works. She argued that music is either a theme or provides a refuge from words (for example *Ghost Trio* with Beethoven or humming and singing Schubert in *Nacht und Traüme*). Then Laws distinguished the musicality of Beckett’s works as a different phenomenon. She mentioned several traits of “Not I” as an example: structure, refrain, anapaest rhythm, echoes or half-sounds. This part of Law’s presentation met with some sceptical responses, as it was felt it was not sufficiently documented. In the last part, Laws discussed other composers’ responses to Beckett.

After the field trip, there was an opportunity to test one’s knowledge about Samuel Beckett in a Beckett Pub Quiz. Four teams supported by experts confronted several rounds of 10 questions about Beckett’s biography, prose and theatre work, quotations, images and miscellaneous related topics.

Day 4: Lecture number six was delivered by Nadia Louar: “Encore le corps...body remains in the *Trilogy*”. Louar explored several linguistic questions related to body memory and topography as well as some ideas close to geopoetics. She claimed that in *Molloy* the geography of the limits of the human body is particularly striking and argued that “bodies don’t tell the stories anymore, the stories map themselves in geography”. The lecture was followed by a roundtable about Beckett and politics and political Beckett. The main issue raised during the discussion questioned the use of academic research in relation to performative studies and the application of such a “theoretical” approach to a practitioner’s work. Nevertheless, it turned out that Beckett’s work nowadays is surrounded by politics: whether it involves the Beckett Estate declining to authorise a production, censorship, or LGBT circles using Beckett for non-artistic (?) purposes, the question should not be about how he is political, but rather what we can do about it.

Some answers and even more pending questions related to a discussion about Beckett's politics emerged during an evening meeting (open to the public) with Olwen Fouéré, an Irish artist who has recently toured with several Beckett productions.

Day 5: The last day of the Summer School was devoted to seminar presentations and Laboratory Showcase. The performance seminar focused on sound in theatre in general and in Beckett's work in particular. The group agreed that if we pay special attention to a text, there is no silence, as even when no words are spoken there is always the human noise of the public. Another proof for the absence of perfect silence can be found in the anechoic chamber, perfectly isolated from the outside world. When one enters such a chamber, one can hear one's own heartbeat as well as blood circulating in the body. Despite the lack of any outer sound, the body itself produces a range of noises. The seminar participants explored various ways of producing sounds with their bodies and the ordinary objects surrounding them. The theatrical installation presented that day encouraged other participants of the summer school to explore sounds, listen to phrases chosen from Beckett's work and experience the sense of teamwork developed during the week.

A farewell banquet was the last event which gathered together Summer School participants, professors and artists. Some of them will come back next year to learn, share ideas and socialise with other Samuel Beckett enthusiasts.

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