

reproducing norms, power structures, and hierarchies associated with dominant ideologies and does so with real teeth. Theatre companies who pursue the kind of important, necessary, and revolutionary work for which Rowen advocates should be aware of the risks that come from a system that invests the author with virtually unchecked omnipotence.

One day it would be nice to see a theatre company fight one of these cease and desists on the grounds that they had, in fact, followed the stage directions, but such a fight would need to be planned and well-funded, as intellectual property cases can cost millions to litigate. In the meantime, any theatre company or student director stirred or moved by Rowen's effective arguments and calls to action—a highly likely possibility given Rowen's passionate writing style and effective rhetoric—should operate with an awareness of the very real imbalances in legal power in the contemporary theatre landscape.

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Beckett beyond the Normal

Edited by Seán Kennedy. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020; pp. ix + 155. \$100 cloth, \$24.95 paper, \$100 e-book.

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In *Beckett's Political Imagination* (2017), Emily Morin explores the difficulties and perils involved in defining a Beckettian politics, especially since this question has produced fraught debate since the inception of Beckett studies. The essays of *Beckett beyond the Normal* (2020) nonetheless take on the challenge of historicizing Beckett's work within the political context of mid-twentieth-century Europe, drawing impetus from the renewed critical interest in theorizing the politics of the Beckettian corpus. The chapters are organized chronologically by the publication date of their primary text, with a range of Beckett's novels, dramas, and nonfiction writings discussed across the essays. In his Introduction, Seán Kennedy delineates the argument that draws these essays together: "Beckett was exercised by modernity's normalizing regimes but wary of claims that art could get us beyond them" (3). This is a claim common to the essays published here, with each scholar applying a critical skepticism to humanist contentions of a redemptive literary aesthetic. The volume suggests that such a humanism, what Kennedy terms, following Beckett, a "redemptive perversion" (2), riddles the field of Beckett studies. With varied success, the essays attempt to define a Beckettian politics distrustful of liberal humanist values, arguing that Beckett's works instead probe the contradictions and exclusions that are shown to suffuse many of the naive and optimistic principles of this politics. They follow the general trend, with a political inflection, that the field has taken over the past few decades, but seek to revise this claimed "redemptive perversion." There are some excellent essays in the volume that offer insightful readings

and make valuable contributions to the critical literature. Of the others, all but one develop intriguing contexts for Beckett's work, though several attribute authorial intention where this seems doubtful and/or become mired in arguments that detract from the wider implications of their readings.

Unfortunately, a few essays display what could be considered a strained effort to pigeonhole Beckett into a politicohistorical discourse; such an approach, it may be argued, neglects to account for or explore the complex ambiguities of Beckett's political mode, identified by Adorno in the 1960s. Dominic Walker, for example, claims that the name "Pam" in *How It Is* (1964) "slam[s] the text into historical particularity" (130) through reference to "the notorious legal acronym for prisoners for torture (PAM or '*pris les armes à la main*' ('captured with weapons'))" (118) during the War of Algerian Independence. Walker reads this reference with a letter Beckett sent to Pamela Mitchell two years before starting *How It Is*; he argues, "tortured revolutionary women are made to stand for Beckett's ex, and Beckett's ex is made to stand for tortured revolutionary women" (130). Although he makes a strong case for a reading of the text in the context of 1960s French political discourses about torture, Walker's interpretation of the name "Pam" appears to be overemphasized: the notion that this reference forcefully situates the text within a singular historical context obfuscates an assessment of the indirect forms of Beckett's political style. Seán Kennedy likewise provides a compelling historical context against which to read the politics of Beckett's work: religious discourses—specifically Protestant evangelicalism—that appealed to divine law to rationalize the deaths of Irish citizens during the famines of the nineteenth century. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics to think through the question of complicity in political violence, Kennedy argues that Beckett's work reveals his knowledge that "he was neither responsible, nor exempt from responsibility" for Irish famine (77). Although Kennedy provides this suggestive discursive context against which to read Beckett's work, there is a significant lack of text from Beckett quoted to substantiate his argument. When a Beckett work is referenced directly, Kennedy occasionally overburdens the text with a singular significance to the detriment of a more nuanced reading that acknowledges or analyzes the implications of the interplay of discourses inscribed in the Beckettian text.

But there are three exceptional essays in this volume that make concise and perceptive interventions into the critical literature. Hannah Simpson draws on clinical pain studies to argue that contrary to optimistic or redemptive readings of his aesthetics, "Beckett's work . . . demonstrates pain's near simultaneous engendering of sympathy *and* aversion: sympathy generated by pain is precisely the reason why perceived pain generates aversion" (84). Simpson historicizes this affective complex with a reading of *Waiting for Godot* (1954), arguing that the violent conflicts of the twentieth century produced a "historically contingent pessimism": "The horrors of World War II in particular were not likely to instill confidence in any redemptive human impulse to compassion" (80). William Davies follows a similar revisionist trend by arguing that "Beckett's aesthetic sensibilities shape his response to the political ideologies he encountered" (44). Davies excavates Beckett's critique of historical narrativization and teleology developed in the 1930s to argue that the aesthetic enactment of this critique in *Watt* (1953) becomes politically charged when read against the context of Nazi rhetoric leading up to and during World

War II. Bryon Heffer, reading *The Unnamable* (1958) within the same historical context, employs Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life" to interrogate the disintegrating Beckettian body. Heffer adeptly interrogates the ethical dimension of Beckett's aesthetics of "de-creation," remaining critically ambivalent about the ethics of Beckett's art by indicating the resistances it enacts while also arguing that "Beckett's stripping away of the flesh implicates his art in violence rather than removing it to a transcendent standpoint of ethical purity" (56). Heffer seems to suggest that it is this ambiguity that makes Beckett's work so troubling to readers, while potentially demonstrating a powerful critique of political regimes that devalue life.

Overall, this volume provides a welcome intervention into the critical literature by expanding our understanding of the intersections between the Beckettian aesthetic and its politicohistorical contexts. However, some of the chapters fall short in developing our comprehension of the intricacies of a Beckettian politics, for which a critical account remains difficult to navigate despite recent advancements in the field.

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Dismemberment in the Medieval and Early Modern English Imaginary: The Performance of Difference

By Frederika Elizabeth Bain. *Late Tudor and Stuart Drama*. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter / Medieval Institute Publications, 2020; pp. x + 303, 1 illustration. \$115.99 cloth, \$155.99 e-book.

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Dismemberment in the Medieval and Early Modern English Imaginary: The Performance of Difference intercedes in discussions around the estrangement and familiarity of premodern English somatic discursivity. Trafficking in transgeneric literary sketches of corporal fragmentation, Frederika Elizabeth Bain examines how dismemberment, as an extreme form of "bodily alterations," codes or "concretize[s]" categorical distinctions across a spectrum of active agents and passive recipients (2). Bain argues for dismemberment's actionable effects in the premodern imaginary by observing it as a movement between somatic metaphor and physical act, with the two constantly conditioning the production of difference within a variety of technologies defining human status: gender, the animal-human boundary, monstrosity, social class, and religion. Although the study pendulously sways between Elaine Scarry's influential work *The Body in Pain* and Foucault's apparatus of exhibitory sovereign power in *Discipline and Punish*, Bain's focus remains on the deep continuities in acts of bodily partition prevalent in the medieval and early modern periods. With an empathy for the lived experience of the actual bodies in these eras, *Dismemberment* disturbs neat conclusions about fragmentation as