BECKETT AND BUDDHISM

Beckett and Buddhism undertakes a twenty-first-century reassessment of the Buddhist resonances in Samuel Beckett’s writing. These reverberations, as Angela Moorjani demonstrates, originated in his early reading of Schopenhauer. Drawing on letters and archives along with recent studies of Buddhist thought and Schopenhauer’s knowledge of it, the book charts the Buddhist concepts circling through Beckett’s visions of the ‘human predicament’ in a blend of tears and laughter. Moorjani offers an in-depth elucidation of texts that are shown to intersect with the negative and paradoxical path of the Buddha, which she sets in dialogue with Western thinking. She brings further perspectives from cognitive philosophy and science to bear on creative emptiness, the illusory ‘I’, and Beckett’s probing of the writing process. Readers will benefit from this far-reaching study of one of the most acclaimed writers of the twentieth century who explored uncharted topologies in his fiction, theatre, and poetry.

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For Kishin
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Acknowledgments

For many years I had wanted to explore in greater depth the sources of Buddhist echoes in Beckett’s fiction and theatre, so on receiving an invitation to lecture on a topic of my choice at the 2016 Samuel Beckett Summer School at Trinity College Dublin, I set to work on a paper entitled ‘What the Archive Tells Us about Beckett and Buddhism’. I owe a debt of gratitude to Sam Slote and Nicholas Johnson for their invitation and hospitality and to the audience of students, faculty, and summer school participants from around the globe for their questions, comments, and interest in knowing more about the topic of my lecture. Special thanks to Rónán McDonald, a fellow lecturer at the summer school that year, whose suggestion that I expand the lecture into a book led to my seriously considering this project. I remain grateful to Minako Okamuro, whose invitation to teach a seminar on Beckett’s theatre at Tokyo’s Waseda University in 2008 brought with it opportunities to interact with the Samuel Beckett Research Circle of Japan and to experience Japan’s Buddhist-imbued culture, especially in the theatre and the arts. But it is the unfailing support, forbearance, and solicitude of Kishin Moorjani that made possible the years of intense research and writing for both the lecture and the book. His involvement with my passion for Beckett’s oeuvre dates to the time of the writing of my doctoral dissertation in the late 1960s and my always renewed attempts to grapple with the work’s multidimensionality. One could not wish for a more sympathetic, astute, and witty conversation partner through it all, for whose unfaltering encouragement and kindness, not to forget his reading of an earlier version of the manuscript, there are no adequate words of gratitude.

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Abbreviations of Editions Used

Works by Beckett

Cc  Comment c’est (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1961).
Dis  Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writing and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. by Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984).
Film  Film: Complete Scenario/Illustrations/Production Shots (New York, Grove Press, 1969).
Fin  Fin de partie, suivi de Acte sans paroles (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1957; 1967 ed.).
In  L’Innommable (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1953; 2016 ed.).
List of Abbreviations


Works by Meister Eckhart


List of Abbreviations


Works by Fritz Mauthner


Works by Nāgārjuna


Works by Arthur Schopenhauer


Library Archives

TCD  Trinity College Dublin Library, Department of Manuscripts

UoR  Beckett International Foundation, The University of Reading

Notes on the Text

Parenthetical translations from French and German, without quotation marks, are the author’s. On first mention of texts Beckett
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wrote first in French and subsequently translated into English, both
the French and English titles are given. Because of constraints of
space, in subsequent discussion, reluctantly, only the English
versions are cited except for comparisons. Diacritics and italics are
used to mark transliterated Sanskrit terms, even when these, *nirvāṇa*
for example, are in common usage in English. The intent is to
defamiliarize such terms in order to draw attention to their meanings
in Eastern thought. Among the exceptions are the words ‘karma’ and
‘Upanishads’ and the name Shankara, which are commonly
transliterated without diacritics. Underlining is used to indicate
words or titles underscored by Beckett and others in their letters
and drafts.